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Famine and the Politics of Food Relief
in United States Relations with Ethiopia:
1950-1991

Edward Kissi

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
History

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

October, 1997

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ABSTRACT

FAMINE AND THE POLITICS OF FOOD RELIEF IN UNITED STATES RELATIONS WITH ETHIOPIA: 1950-1991

Edward Kissi, Ph.D.
Concordia University, 1997

The dissertation examines famine in Ethiopia as an issue in U.S.-Ethiopian relations from 1950 to 1991. It argues that to avoid restructuring Ethiopia's semi-feudal society, and to make military security the primary goal of its foreign relations, the Imperial Ethiopian Government opposed U.S. efforts to place land reform and agricultural development at the centre of its priorities in Ethiopia from 1950 to 1974. Although the Revolutionary Government, which deposed the Imperial Government and ruled Ethiopia from 1975 to 1991, promoted land reform, its agricultural policies and domestic politics violated human rights in a period when democratization and human rights had become the prerequisites for American agricultural aid. The dissertation challenges the argument that the Revolutionary Government deliberately created famine to embark on a well-defined program of genocide against its ethnic and political foes. It provides an alternative view that in the war to settle their competing visions of post-Imperial Ethiopia, the Revolutionary Government and its opponents used famine, starvation and terror to create domestic allegiance and external sympathy. U.S.-Ethiopian relations deteriorated over the human rights

atrocities, anti-American attitude and communist orientation of the Revolutionary Government, but Washington and Addis Ababa cooperated to save lives threatened by war and famine.

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Concordia University nurtured me and showed me the many advantages of studying there. From its graduate fellowships, I obtained vital financial support for my studies and research, and its awards opened further avenues of funding to me. Through the University, I won a Quebec Black Medical Association scholarship in 1995 and a dissertation writing fellowship in Human Rights at the Atlantic Human Rights Center (AHRC) of St. Thomas University, in Fredericton, New Brunswick, in 1997. Both fellowships helped me to complete this work. Senator Noel Kinsella and Dr. Russell McNeilly of the AHRC augmented my intellectual resources.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	African Development Bank
AEPA	All Ethiopian Peasants Association
AIDB	Agricultural and Industrial Development Bank
AMC	Agricultural Marketing Corporation
ALF	Afar Liberation Front
CADU	Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit
CBO	Cross-Border Operation
CELU	Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions
COPWE	Commission for Organizing the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia
CPP	Comprehensive Package Program
CRDA	Christian Relief and Development Association
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSO	Central Statistics Organization
DUPE	Democratic Unity Party of Ethiopia
EAC	Ethiopian Amalgamated Company
EATAS	Eritrean-American Technical Service
EEC	European Economic Community
EPDM	Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement
EPLF	Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Revolutionary Front
EPRP	Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party
ERA	Eritrean Relief Organization
ESUNA	Ethiopian Students Union of North America
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
FEWS	Famine Early-Warning System
FFYDP	First Five-Year Development Plan
FOA	Foreign Operations Administration
GPLM	Gambella Peoples Liberation Movement
ICA-W	International Cooperation Administration (Washington)
IEG	Imperial Ethiopian Government
IHA	Imperial Highway Authority
ME'ISON	All Ethiopian Socialist Movement
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MPH	Ministry of Public Health
MPP	Minimum Package Program
MSF-F	Medécines Sans Frontières (France)
MTSC	Maritime Transport Services Corporation
NAMRU	Navy Medical Research Unit (USA)
NATRACOR	National Transport Company
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NMSA	National Meteorological Services Agency
NSC	National Security Council
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OCB	Operations Coordinating Board

OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
ORA	Oromo Relief Association
PA	Peasant Association
PMAC	Provisional Military Administrative Council
PMGSE	Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia
REST	Relief Society of Tigray
RRC	Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
SA	Settlement Authority
SFYDP	Second Five-Year Development
TFYDP	Third Five-Year Development Plan
TPLF	Tigray Peoples Liberation Front
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNDR0	United Nations Disaster Relief Organization
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission on Refugees
UNOEOE	United Nations Office for Emergency Operations in Ethiopia
USAID/	
AID-W	United States Agency for International Development
USAID-E	United States Agency for International Development Mission to Ethiopia
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USIS	United States Information Service
USOM-E	United States Operations Mission to Ethiopia
WFP	World Food Program
WPE	Workers Party of Ethiopia
WSLF	Western Somalia Liberation Front
WTOE	World Food Program Transport Operationn

INTRODUCTION

Chronic hunger and malnutrition represent the most compelling dilemma of our times...and...[the greatest] concern of people around the globe who share a commitment to see its resolution by the end of the century.

Rome Declaration on Hunger,
16 October 1982

David Arnold is right in observing that "images of hunger are among the powerful and distressful visions of our age."¹ As he elaborates, these visions suggest "perhaps unintentionally" that nations which experience famine are "powerless... in their submission to deprivation." The image of the famine-struck as "victims... to be saved and succoured ..." grants nations which provide famine aid the "honored role" of donor and confers upon those who receive it the "demeaning status" of beggar.² Media images of mass death from famine and starvation in Ethiopia, in 1974 and 1984, may have receded in the public memory, but their roots and significance continue to generate debate.

Recent studies of the 1984 famine in Ethiopia reflect a controversy between scholars and writers who attribute it to a decline in the availability of food caused by natural factors and those who blame it on deliberate state actions

¹ David Arnold, Famine: Social Crisis and Historical Change (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), pp. 73-74.

² Ibid.

intended to create famine for political reasons. Amartya Sen, the economist, has rejected the conventional food availability decline explanation of famine because of its failure to explain why some groups starve during famines and others thrive.³ Sen's application of his view to the famine which occurred in Wollo, in northeastern Ethiopia between 1972 and 1974, has yielded one of the most compelling, but controversial conclusions about the famine. According to Sen, the Wollo famine did not result from a shortage of food, but rather from "direct entitlement failure." In his opinion, very little food moved to Wollo province not because of poor roads or limited transport, but because the inhabitants lacked the "market command," or purchasing power, to buy available food.⁴

Sen's entitlement theory has become the linchpin of analyses of famine. Studies of Ethiopia's famine experiences in the 1970s and 1980s influenced by Sen's seminal work share the premise that the famines were economic disasters caused by poverty and underdevelopment. Writers such as Frederick Cuny, Graham Hancock, Peter Gill, Michael Barton and Lawrence Pezzullo highlight the entitlement thesis in their analyses of

³ Amartya Sen, Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p.45; Amartya Sen, "Famines" World Development Vol. 8, No.9 (1980): 614.

⁴ Amartya Sen, Poverty and Famines, pp.41, 94-96. See also Amartya Sen, "Food Entitlements and Economic Chains: Hunger, Entitlements, and Linkages," in Lucile F. Newman, ed., Hunger in History: Food Shortage, Poverty, and Deprivation (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p.375.

the recent famines in Ethiopia. They conclude that the 1972 to 1974 and 1984 to 1986 famines only exposed the structural problems of poverty and underdevelopment that compounded the consequences of Ethiopia's degraded physical environment.⁵ Frederick Cuny characterizes as "incredible" the rate of "desertification and drought" in Ethiopia's major food producing regions, since the turn of the twentieth century.⁶ Cuny, Hancock, Gill, Barton and Pezzullo, among others, do not regard the Ethiopian famine of 1984 to 1986 as a unique or separate experience, but as an extension of the 1972 to 1974 famine of the Haile Sellassie period.⁷

⁵ See Michael Barton, "Ethiopian Refugees: Resettlement and Repatriation in the Horn," Africa Report 29, No.1 (Jan.-Feb., 1984); Graham Hancock, Ethiopia: The Challenge of Hunger (London:Victor Gollancz, 1985); Peter Gill, A Year in the Death of Africa: Politics, Bureaucracy and the Famine (London:Paladin Grafton Books, 1986); Kebede Girma and Mary J. Jacob, "Drought, Famine, and the Political Economy of Environmental Degradation in Ethiopia," Geography 73 (1988); Hugh Goyder and Catherine Goyder, "Case Studies of Famine: Ethiopia" in Donald Curtis, Michael Hubbard, and Andrew Shepherd, Preventing Famine: Policies and Prospects for Africa (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 82; Frederick Cuny, "Politics and Famine Relief," in Bruce Nichols and Gil Loescher, eds., The Moral Nation: Humanitarianism and U.S. Foreign Policy Today (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989); Lawrence Pezzullo, "Catholic Relief Services in Ethiopia: A Case Study," in Bruce Nichols and Gil Loescher, eds., The Moral Nation, p.218.

⁶ Frederick Cuny, "Politics and Famine Relief," in Bruce Nichols and Gil Loescher, eds., The Moral Nation, p. 279.

⁷ See Graham Hancock, Ethiopia: The Challenge of Hunger (London : Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1985), pp. 12, 74; Michael S. Barton, "Ethiopian Refugees: Resettlement and Repatriation in the Horn," Africa Report Vol.29, No.1 (Jan.-Feb. 1984): 20-22; Lawrence A. Pezzullo, "Catholic Relief Services in Ethiopia: A Case Study," in Bruce Nichols and Gil Loescher, eds., The Moral Nation, pp. 218, 280; Angela Penrose, "Before and

The conventional idea that famines are mainly the product of nature has failed to withstand deeper analyses. It is now widely accepted that it is under certain conditions that drought and other climatic mishaps lead to famine. Paul Henze has wondered why Ethiopia and Kenya, both poor African countries, experienced similar climatic conditions in 1984, but severe famine occurred in Ethiopia and such a situation was prevented in Kenya.⁸

Sen's entitlement thesis privileges market forces over political and social factors. But at certain periods of time, political and social factors negatively affect conditions of exchange and cause entitlement failures. Paul Henze, Vernon Ruttan and Michael Lofchie are probably right in arguing that political instability, created or fuelled by civil wars, lack of political legitimacy and loss of social trust are the more serious causes of famine.⁹

After," in Kurt Jansson, Michael Harris, and Angela Penrose, The Ethiopian Famine, Revised and Updated Edition, (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1990), pp. 85, 134.

⁸ Paul Henze, "Behind the Ethiopian Famine: Anatomy of a Revolution." Part II, Encounter 67, no.2 (July-August 1986): 26. See also Thomas E. Downing et al., Coping With Drought in Kenya: National and Local Strategies (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), pp. 28-29, 50, 57, 362.

⁹ Vernon Ruttan, ed., Why Food Aid? (Baltimore, MD.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 227-228; Michael F. Lofchie, "Africa's Agricultural Crisis: An Overview," in Stephen K. Commins et al., eds., Africa's Agrarian Crisis: The Roots of Famine (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1986), p.4. See also Basu R. Dipak, "Sen's Analyses of Famine: A Critique," Journal of Development Studies 22 (1986): 598; Rehman Sobhan, "The Politics of Hunger and Entitlements," in John Dreze and Amartya Sen, eds., The Political Economy of

The entitlement thesis has been enhanced by studies of how political factors affected food production and acquisition capacities in Ethiopia. The consequences of the policies of the Mengistu government form the bases of alternative views that the revolutionary Ethiopian government deliberately caused or neglected famine in 1984 for political reasons.¹⁰ Peter Niggli, Robert Kaplan, Stephen Varnis, Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb, Edmund Keller, Alexander de Waal, and others, assert that the famine resulted from the disruptive economic policies of the government as well as its intentional use of starvation as a weapon of war against political opponents.

Hunger Vol.1: Entitlement and Well Being (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 79, 80, 82, 103-4; Robert W. Kates and Sara Millman, "On Ending Hunger: The Lessons of History." in Lucile F. Newman, ed., Hunger in History: Food Shortage, Poverty and Deprivation (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p.400.

¹⁰ See Jack Shepherd, The Politics of Starvation (Washington, D.C.: Carneige Endowment for International Peace, 1975); Peter Niggli, Ethiopia: Deportations and Forced Labour Camps: A Study by Peter Niggli on Behalf of Berliner Missionswerk (Berlin: Berliner Missionswerk, 1986); Robert Kaplan, Surrender or Starve: The Wars Behind the Famine (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1988); Stephen Varnis, Reluctant Aid or Aiding the Reluctant?: U.S. Aid Policy and Ethiopian Relief (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1990), pp. 6, 8, 11; Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb, Politics and the Ethiopian Famine, 1984-1986, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass: Cultural Survival Inc., 1986); Jason W. Clay, "Ethiopian Famine and the Relief Agencies," in Bruce Nichols and Gil Loescher, The Moral Nation, p. 237; Alex de Waal, ed., Evil Days: 30 Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991); Edmund J. Keller, "Drought, War, and the Politics of Famine in Ethiopia and Eritrea," Journal of Modern African Studies 30, no.4 (1992): 623; David Korn, Ethiopia, The United States and the Soviet Union (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 118, 166, 183.

Clay and Holcomb contend that the Mengistu government's socialist agricultural policies fostered famine and starvation. They point to food requisitions by the Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC) and "forced labour" on state farms as some of the deliberate measures that broke the morale of peasants.¹¹ The policies of the Revolutionary Government, and the manner in which they were implemented, before and during the famine, give credence to questions that these scholars and writers have raised about the intent of the policies of the Ethiopian state. Kurt Jansson, who headed the United Nations relief operations in Ethiopia, has criticized the narratives which establish an intentional starvation theory about the Ethiopian famine of 1984.¹² The burden of proof of intent to create famine lies in the difficulty of establishing a clear line of demarcation between deliberate state famine-inducement policies and the unintended consequences of misguided revolutionary policies or badly-implemented, but well-intentioned state agricultural development programs.

The agricultural policies of the Ethiopian government, particularly the low pricing of agricultural products and the wilful seizure of the farming implements of some peasants,

¹¹ Jason W. Clay and Bonnie Holcomb, Politics and the Ethiopian Famine, 1984-1986, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Cultural Survival Inc., 1986), pp. 247-8.

¹² Kurt Jansson, "The Emergency Relief Operation--An Inside View," in Kurt Jansson, Michael Harris, and Angela Penrose, The Ethiopian Famine, pp. 25, 46, 47, 52, 69.

undoubtedly offered little material incentive for peasants to increase food production.¹³ David Korn, who was the U.S. Chargé d'Affaires in Ethiopia during the famine, shares Clay and Holcomb's view that the agricultural policies of the Mengistu government caused and aggravated the famine.¹⁴ Stephen Varnis is even more emphatic in his view that the famine was the consequence of the adoption of "the Soviet model of social, political and agricultural development."¹⁵

The views of Korn, Varnis, and Clay and Holcomb suggest that what was required to prevent famine in Ethiopia was avoidance of state interference in food production and marketing. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, an official of the Revolutionary Government who defected, acknowledges that the policies of his government broke the morale of farmers and affected their production of food.¹⁶ However, Dawit, who also headed Ethiopia's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, does not view those policies as deliberate acts to create famine

¹³ See Alex de Waal, Evil Days, p.5; and Jason W. Clay et al. The Spoils of Famine: Ethiopian Famine Policy and Peasant Agriculture (Cambridge, Mass.: Cultural Survival, 1988), p. 3.

¹⁴ David A. Korn, Ethiopia, the United States and the Soviet Union (London: Croom Helm, 1986) p. xvi.

¹⁵ Stephen Varnis, Reluctant Aid or Aiding the Reluctant?, pp. 8, 38, 105.

¹⁶ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia (Trenton, New Jersey: The Red Sea Press Inc., 1989), pp. 265-266, 270-271.

for political benefit, but rather as sincere policies which failed because of "mismanagement" and civil war.¹⁷

Scholars and writers who blame the famine on government policies also argue that the Revolutionary Government should have accommodated its opponents and made an avoidable mistake by seeking a military solution to its domestic political problems. The effects of the ensuing civil war on access to food continue to fuel and polarise the debate. Some writers have attributed the consequent mass death from starvation to what Kurt Jonassohn describes as the use of hunger as "a low technology weapon" in the conduct of war.¹⁸ According to a 1991 Human Rights Watch-Africa report, the distribution of food according to political allegiance in Ethiopia, in 1984, became a pervasive government "counter-insurgency strategy."¹⁹ Peter Woodward provides an alternative explanation of war and ethnic strife in Ethiopia. He places post-World War II American and Soviet rivalry in the strategic Horn of Africa at the centre of the civil wars that destroyed food resources and perpetuated famine in Ethiopia. In his view, the militarization of Ethiopia by the United States and the former

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Kurt Jonassohn, "Hunger as A Low Technology Weapon, with Special Reference to Genocide," *Montreal Institute for Genocide Studies Occasional Papers* (July 1991): 4.

¹⁹ Alexander de Waal, Evil Days p.133. See also Robert D. Kaplan, Surrender or Starve: The Wars Behind the Famine (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1988), p. 6., and Peter Niggli, Ethiopia: Deportations and Forced Labour Camps, p.32.

Soviet Union accentuated ethnic conflicts in the country.²⁰

Stephen Varnis and Robert Kaplan disagree. They argue that domestic responsibility for war and famine in Ethiopia outweighs any external machinations. Varnis and Kaplan locate the roots of famine in Ethiopia in the manner in which Ethiopians conducted war rather than the source of their weapons.²¹ In its 1991 report on war and famine in Ethiopia, Human Rights Watch-Africa cited the counter-insurgency strategies of the revolutionary Ethiopian government as "the single most important reason why the drought of 1983-84 became not a "normal" period of hardship, but a famine of a severity and extent unparalleled for a century."²²

The expansion of the Ethiopian army and the implementation of "massive" resettlement in the course of the famine deepen the anxiety of scholars about the character of the Revolutionary Government. According to the Human Rights Watch-Africa report, the resettlement of people from northern Ethiopia to the southern and southwestern provinces "killed people at a faster rate than the famine."²³ The intensification of resettlement, in the absence of logistics and financial

²⁰ Peter Woodward, "Political Factors Contributing to the Generation of Refugees in the Horn of Africa," International Relations 9, no. 2 (Nov. 1987): 112.

²¹ See Robert Kaplan, Surrender or Starve p. 6, and Stephen Varnis, Reluctant Aid or Aiding the Reluctant? p. 7.

²² Alex de Waal, Evil Days, p. 133.

²³ Ibid., p. 224.

resources, and the cruel methods used to implement the program, cast doubt on its economic and famine-alleviation objectives.²⁴ As Hailu Lemma observes, forced resettlement constituted the Revolutionary Government's "cunning way of weakening aspirations of oppressed nationalities."²⁵

The French human rights organization, *Médecines Sans Frontières*, compared the Mengistu government's resettlement programme to the Holocaust, and the genocide committed by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.²⁶ In January 1986, the Wall Street Journal accused the Ethiopian government of orchestrating "group murder" comparable to the genocide committed by the Turkish government against Armenians in 1915.²⁷ Critics of the Revolutionary Government's resettlement programme such as Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb argue that the government used international food relief to facilitate that genocidal program. Clay and Holcomb emphasise that "the provision of humanitarian assistance" by Western governments "with no

²⁴ See Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb, Politics and the Ethiopian Famine, pp. 33, 170, 172, and Peter Niggli, Ethiopia: Deportations and Forced Labour Camps, pp. 2, 8, 9.

²⁵ Hailu Lemma, "The Politics of Famine in Ethiopia," Review of African Political Economy, no. 33 (August 1985): 53, 282. See also Robert Kaplan, Surrender or Starve, p. 20.

²⁶ *Médecines Sans Frontières*, "Mass Deportations in Ethiopia," *Confidential Report*, December 1985, p. 65.

²⁷ The Wall Street Journal, "Today's Holocaust," 27 January 1986, p. 24.

questions asked" helped the Ethiopian government to "get away with murder."²⁸

Two interpretations of the Western response to the Ethiopian famine of the 1980s pervade the literature. The first group of analysts argues that Western ideological antipathy towards the Ethiopian socialist government accounted for the anti-communist West's erratic and reluctant response to the 1984 famine in Ethiopia.²⁹ Writers who support that conspiracy hypothesis focus on the attitude of the United States. Jack Shepherd, Peter Gill, Andreas Uhlig, Graham Hancock and Kurt Jansson argue that the Reagan Administration found nothing praiseworthy about the Ethiopian government's agricultural development policies such as resettlement and deliberately delayed American food assistance to Ethiopia to induce political change in Addis Ababa or to make Ethiopia a symbol of failure of socialism in Africa.³⁰

The second group of analysts argues that the authoritarian policies of the Revolutionary Government and its

²⁸ Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb, Politics and the Ethiopian Famine, p. 193; Jason Clay, "Ethiopian Famine and the Relief Agencies," p. 267.

²⁹ See Jack Shepherd, "Ethiopia: The Use of Food As An Instrument of U.S. Foreign Policy," Issue, 14 (1985): 4; Hailu Lemma, "The Politics of Famine in Ethiopia," p. 57.

³⁰ See Peter Gill, A Year in the Death of Africa pp. 41, 45; Andreas Uhlig, "Hunger and Erosion: Africa's Vicious Cycle," p. 20. See Graham Hancock, Ethiopia: The Challenge of Hunger, pp. 108, 113., Frederick Cuny, "Politics and Famine Relief," p. 284; Kurt Jansson, "The Emergency Operation: An Inside View," p. 64.

hostile attitude towards Western countries discouraged them from assisting it.³¹ As Stephen Varnis puts it, the problem was not reluctantly assisting Ethiopia, but rather the difficulty of assisting a reluctant government of Ethiopia.³²

David Korn, the American Chargé d'Affaires in Ethiopia during the 1984 famine, and Donald Peterson, the American Ambassador in neighbouring Somalia from 1978 to 1983, explain the U.S. response. Korn contends that logistical and foreign policy constraints, as well as the Mengistu government's uncooperative attitude, shaped the U.S. response. Donald Peterson, who later served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs in the Reagan Administration, acknowledges that Ethiopia's ties with the Soviet Union permeated discussions in Congress, but did not finally determine American relief policy toward Ethiopia.³³ Peterson argues that uncertainty about the extent of the famine, budgetary constraints, preoccupation with Central America and the human rights record of the Ethiopian government influenced the American response to the famine.³⁴

³¹ Robert Kaplan, Surrender or Starve, p. 34.

³² Stephen Varnis, Reluctant Aid or Aiding the Reluctant, p. 143; See also Michael Bazyler, "Re-examining the Doctrine of Humanitarian Intervention," p. 564.

³³ See Donald Peterson, "Ethiopia Abandoned?: An American Perspective," International Affairs 62, no.4 (Autumn 1986): 627. See also Stephen Varnis, Reluctant Aid or Aiding the Reluctant?, p. 91.

³⁴ Donald Peterson, "Ethiopia Abandoned?," p. 637.

However striking the arguments made for or against the American response, the circumstances under which aid was withheld or granted need more detailed analyses than have so far been attempted. Similarly, the contending perspectives about the background against which the famine occurred, and the Ethiopian response to it suggest the need for comprehensive research to confirm the actual and clarify the speculative.

Famine has a long history in Ethiopia and American relations with Ethiopia predated the famine of 1984.³⁵ The irony about famine in Ethiopia lies in the fact that Ethiopia and the United States possessed the resources, organizational ability and scientific knowledge to reduce the frequency of famines and to minimize their lethal consequences in Ethiopia. The recurrence of famine in Ethiopia and the controversy over American responses to it provide the basis for a historical

³⁵ See Richard Pankhurst, The History of Famine and Epidemics in Ethiopia Prior to the Twentieth Century (Addis Ababa: Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, 1984); Mesfin Wolde Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine in Ethiopia: 1958-1977 (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1986) pp. 31-37; Christopher Clapham, Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 187; Harold Marcus, Ethiopia, Great Britain and the United States (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1983), p.108; Gopalakrishna Kumar, Ethiopian Famines 1973-1985: A Case Study, Helsinki, Finland: World Institute for Development Economics Research Working Paper No.26, November 1987, p. 6; Roy Pateman, "Drought, Famine and Development," in Lionel Cliffe and Basil Davidson, The Long Struggle of Eritrea for Independence and Constructive Peace (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1988), p. 169. Harold Marcus has dated American official interest in Ethiopia to 1903. See Harold G. Marcus, "A Note on the First United States Diplomatic Mission to Ethiopia in 1903," Ethiopia Observer, 7, 2 (1963): 168.

study of the problem. Paradoxically, much of the existing research focuses on the recent famines of 1974 and 1984. The narrow foci of such analyses limit our understanding of famine in Ethiopia.

What is important yet lacking in the existing literature on famine in Ethiopia and American responses to it is a broader analysis of the Ethiopian and American efforts to prevent and relieve it. Most of the analyses stop at identifying the role that Ethiopian government agricultural and famine relief policies played in the causation or accentuation of particular famines. They barely examine the goals and assumptions which underlay those agricultural policies and how they contributed to the government's ineffective famine relief measures.

An appropriate evaluation of Ethiopia's solutions to famine should take account of the perceptions of the Imperial and Revolutionary governments about famine in Ethiopia. It should also discuss their reactions to American proposals for agricultural development and famine-relief. Such an analysis will explain why the Imperial and Revolutionary governments adopted certain agricultural development and famine-relief policies while rejecting others, and the circumstances under which American officials framed their assistance to Ethiopia. It will also examine the role of famine in the origins of Revolutionary Ethiopia and evaluate the charges of genocide lodged against its leaders.

The choice of Ethiopia and the United States for this study is strategic. The persistence of famine in Ethiopia raises significant questions about famine causation while the historical relations between the United States, a food donor, and Ethiopia, a famine-prone country, highlight issues that are pertinent to the debate on the politics of American food aid. The analytical framework developed by the author, incorporates his recognition of the importance of the three types of famine elaborated by Alexander de Waal in his research on Darfur, in the Sudan. They are famines that cause manageable hunger, famines that create temporary destitution and famines that kill.³⁶ It also draws upon Sara Millman and Robert Kates's contention that "not all food shortages lead to hunger, not all hunger results in starvation, and not all starvation causes death."³⁷

This dissertation emphasizes famines that killed and starvation that deprived both the poor and the rich of their food and their capacity to obtain food. In such famines, the poor and the rich faced imminent death unless the state and its reliable external allies, as agencies of famine prevention, intervened quickly and appropriately to regulate

³⁶ See Alexander de Waal, Famine that Kills: Darfur, Sudan, 1984-85 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 5-8.

³⁷ Sara Millman and Robert W. Kates, "Toward Understanding Hunger," in Lucile F. Newman, ed., Hunger in History: Food Shortage, Poverty, and Deprivation (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 9.

the interlocking forces of nature and the human actions that cause or aggravate famine.

The dissertation identifies and assesses Ethiopian and American strategies to prevent famine through the development of food crops in Ethiopia during the Imperial and Revolutionary periods. It also assesses the famines that occurred in Ethiopia between 1950 and 1991 and how and why the Ethiopian and American governments responded to them. In locating the famine-creating process in Ethiopia, the dissertation will differentiate among famines arising from natural factors, famines emanating from government policies intended to create famine by depriving people of their entitlements to food and those arising from the improper implementation of well-intentioned policies. In analyzing American and Ethiopian policies to relieve famine, the dissertation will also identify famines in which relief decisions not intended to accentuate famine worsened it, nevertheless, because of conceptual errors in the formulation of aid decisions.

The historical perspective on the Ethiopian and American efforts to eradicate famine in Ethiopia which underlies this study will examine the extent to which the persistence of famine in Ethiopia reflected unsurmountable challenges created by underdevelopment and a hostile natural environment. It will also provide clues to analyzing the effects of the American foreign aid program in Ethiopia since World War II. The

results of this study will advance our understanding of how to give aid that reaches the most vulnerable groups without helping the perpetrators of famine or reinforcing the policies which created it. This study will also enrich our knowledge of the less well-known famines in Ethiopia.

Sources

The dissertation is based on American and Ethiopian archival records as well as interviews and specialized secondary sources. Although the Ethiopian ministries of the Interior and Foreign Affairs, and the custodians of the files of the former Agricultural Marketing Corporation, denied the author access to their records and the pertinent files of the Politburo of the Revolutionary Government, the picture of Ethiopian government policies presented in this dissertation is based on extensive research in other Ethiopian and American sources. They include the records of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, the minutes of the meetings of the Christian Relief and Development Association, the records of the U.N. Disaster Relief Organization, and the files of the World Food Programme and the Food and Agricultural Organization available at their offices in Ethiopia.

To this wide range of sources have been added the records of the U.S. Catholic Relief Services office in Addis Ababa and the files of the U.S. Embassy in Ethiopia, now available at

the U.S. National Archives. The author's archival research has been augmented by interviews with Ethiopian peasants, officials of the former Imperial and Revolutionary governments, former American Ambassadors to Ethiopia and other American officials who played key roles in the making of U.S. policy towards Ethiopia. These sources provide insights into agricultural conditions in rural Ethiopia and the politics which characterized Ethiopian and American responses to them.

Methodology

The contribution of natural factors, environmental degradation and population growth to the development of famine in Ethiopia is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The literature on famine in Ethiopia overwhelmingly concludes that government policies played a much more important role in the lethal consequences of famine than nature. This case is conclusively made by authors such as Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Dessalegn Rahmato, Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb. With respect to the 1984-85 famine, the conference on *Famine in Ethiopia: Learning from the Past to Prepare for the Present* reached a similar conclusion in the Addis Ababa Statement of 18 March 1995. It declared that "the 1984-85 famine was in fact a political crisis characterized more appropriately by war than by drought."³⁸ The author's interest lies in exploring the

³⁸ See "The Addis Ababa Statement on Famine: Learning from the Past to Prepare for the Present," 18 March 1995, p.1. This statement can be obtained from the Inter-Africa Group or the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, in Addis Ababa. It is also available on the Web at <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African>

contribution of U.S-Ethiopian relations in shaping the politics of food relief to ameliorate suffering and the creation of processes to prevent future famines in Ethiopia and other countries afflicted by civil strife.

Readers may wonder about why population figures are not provided as part of the author's discussion. The author shares the opinion of Dessalegn Rahmato that scholars of Ethiopian history have overstated the impact of population on the stagnation of agricultural technology, the depletion of Ethiopian natural resources and the impoverishment of Ethiopian peasants.³⁹ As Dessalegn rightly observes, some parts of Ethiopia with high population densities never suffered lethal famines. Peasants in those regions adopted "environmentally responsible farming practices."⁴⁰ When no human actions undermined their vocation, they were able to survive despite their high birth rates.

Ethiopian population figures for the years 1950 to 1991 are notoriously unreliable. Alula Abate has argued that until recently, Ethiopia's population figures were obtained "from guesses and estimates."⁴¹ The author found this to be true

Studies/Hornet/Ben InterAF.html.

³⁹ Dessalegn Rahmato, "Peasant Agriculture Under the Old Regime," in Shiferaw Bekele, ed., An Economic History of Ethiopia, Volume 1: The Imperial Period, 1941-74 (Senegal: CODESRIA Book Series, 1995), p.181.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Alula Abate, "Demography, Migration and Urbanization in Modern Ethiopia," in Shiferaw Bekele, ed., An Economic

during his field-work in Ethiopia in 1995. He found evidence that peasant associations and local government officials regularly inflated household sizes and populations of districts to obtain more international food relief. Where expedient, government officials invented higher growth rates to support claims of higher standards of living. Sceptical American officials often disputed the inflated population figures and food rations supplied by Ethiopian officials.

Senior American and Ethiopian officials advised the author to view the available population data on Ethiopia with great caution. The "Numbers Game," as John Prendergast calls it, was a crucial part of international relief work in Ethiopia. Non-governmental relief organizations dramatized "the numbers of lives saved" in their data on population and relief activities for public relations and fund-raising purposes. Hence, this dissertation avoids the use of demographic statistics.

The author has critically probed his sources. By cross-checking documentary evidence with oral interviews and vice-versa, he detected and has pointed out gaps and contradictions in the written records and oral accounts. He carefully read the records of the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) and those of foreign relief agencies in Addis Ababa, and sought to verify their accounts during his visits to the places where the events occurred. Interviews of the

History of Ethiopia, Volume 1, p.277.

actors and witnesses, weighed against the contents of the written records, lead the author to the conclusion that resettlement and starvation in the 1980s were not intended to eliminate ethnic, national, racial or religious groups. Had there been any such intent, the author believes that he would have detected direct or oblique references to it somewhere in the written records and during his interviews. Therefore, he is convinced that access to the records of the ministries of Foreign Affairs and the Interior, and to the files at the Special Prosecutor's Office, which he could not obtain, would not significantly alter his conclusions.

Jan Vansina's pioneering work on the use of oral tradition as a historical source informs this dissertation.⁴² The author carefully selected his interviewees. He sought information from older and younger people who lived through the Imperial and Revolutionary regimes. The object was to have these interviewees speak from a comparative perspective. Similarly, the author interviewed American officials who helped to shape policy towards Ethiopia, lived and worked in Ethiopia and had close contact with Ethiopian policymakers of the Imperial and Revolutionary periods. In all interviews, the author solicited views on key topics such as agricultural policy, land reform, causes of famines, the making of famine-relief policies and the distribution and impact of food

⁴² See Jan Vansina, Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology, translated by H.M. Wright (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), pp. 1-5.

relief. His field research often altered his understanding of Ethiopian history and American foreign policy, while opening new vistas of inquiry.

Interviewing Ethiopian peasants posed problems. These were mainly problems of language, culture and peasant suspicion about the objectives of the interviews. The author assured his informants that their identities would be confidential if they so desired. He tape-recorded many of the interviews. Where interviewees objected to the recording of testimonies, and to allay their fears, the author took notes. The author conducted individual as well as group interviews. Group interviews provided checks on individual memory lapses, and reduced the risks of deceit and distortion. Where interviewees did not speak English or preferred to speak in Amharic, the author conducted the oral interviews through an interpreter. He knew enough Amharic to monitor the translation of the answers the interviewees gave. To preserve the anonymity of some his informants, the author has identified them in a variety of ways such as "groups of elder peasants" or "a group of relief workers." The translations of all recorded interviews used in the dissertation have been cross-checked with Amharic-speaking Ethiopian scholars at Addis Ababa University and at Concordia University.

CHAPTER ONE

THE POLITICS OF AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN IMPERIAL ETHIOPIA, 1950-1974

It is clear that the fantastic progress achieved by the new independent African states has placed Ethiopia in an embarrassing situation. The new government will...restore Ethiopia to her ancestral place in the world.... As agriculture is the mainstay of the country's economy every assistance will be given to the farmers to raise agricultural production.

Policy Proclamation of the
Architects of the Abortive Coup
on Radio Addis Ababa,
15 December 1960

We believe in a progress which does not strain beyond capacity the social fabric of Our nation or destroy what is the most precious in Ethiopia's traditions and way of life.

Emperor Haile Sellassie's
Coronation Day Address,
2 November 1962

Agriculture is Ethiopia's major economic activity. It is, therefore, not surprising that the ability to feed oneself is the greatest source of dignity in Ethiopian society.¹ It was fashionable in the 1950s and 1960s for the Imperial Ethiopian Government to describe Ethiopia as the breadbasket of the

¹ Author's tape interviews with Alula Pankhurst, Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, Addis Ababa University, 6 March 1995; with Professor Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Chairman, Ethiopian Human Rights Council, Addis Ababa, 8 March 1995; with elder peasants at Mertuley Maryam, Enebse Sermeder woreda, (district) East Gojjam, 5 October 1995; with elder peasants at Wegel Tena in Delanta woreda, North Wollo Administrative Zone, 14 October 1995.

Middle East.² The succession of famines in recent years have undermined the credibility of that claim and led some Ethiopian scholars to regard it as a myth which was false at birth.³

Ironically, the Imperial Ethiopian Government (IEG) had a serious opportunity in its relations with the United States in the 1950s and 1960s to improve its agricultural economy and eradicate famine.⁴ Yet, the IEG "exerted little effort. . .to

² See "Ethiopia's Second Five Year Plan and Envisaged Land Reform: The Emperor's Speech," Ethiopia Observer, 6, no.4 (1963): 297; "The Emperor Haile Sellassie's I's Speech on the Opening of Parliament delivered on November 2nd, 1964," Ethiopia Observer, 8, no. 4 (1965): 276 and Richard Pankhurst, "Notes for A History of Ethiopian Agriculture," Ethiopia Observer, 7, no.3 (1964): 210, and also George Merrel, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, Despatch No. 117, 16 November 1950, "Grains in Ethiopia," RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, Decimal Files (hereafter cited as DF) 1955-59, United States National Archives (hereafter cited as USNA), 875.231/11-1650, Box 5387; Joseph Simonson, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, No.272, 12 March 1954, "Empire of Ethiopia: Summary of Current Economic Information," RG 166: Foreign Agricultural Service Narrative Reports (hereafter cited as FASNR) 1950-54, 875.00/3-1254.

³ See Dessalegn Rahmato, "Neither Feast nor Famine: Prospects for Food Security," in Abebe Zegeye and Siegfried Pausewang, Ethiopia in Change: Peasantry, Nationalism and Democracy (London: British Academic Press, 1994), p. 192.

⁴ For a description of the Imperial Ethiopian Government (IEG), see Michael Stahl, Ethiopia: Political Contradictions in Agricultural Development (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1974), pp.61, 88. The Emperor, and the Council of Ministers comprising the Prime Minister and the heads of ministries constituted the government. The Prime Minister and the heads of ministries were appointees of the Emperor and derived their positions at his pleasure. Heads of ministries were responsible to the Prime Minister who was accountable to the Emperor.

promote agricultural development."⁵ Michael Stahl has attributed the low priority of agriculture in state policy to the Imperial political system, while Bahru Zewde, the Ethiopian historian, has located it in Emperor Haile Sellassie's "megalomania."⁶ Nowhere does the political system or the Emperor's persona operate in as indifferent a form as in historian Tekalign Wolde-Mariam's documented cases of desperate peasants petitioning the Emperor for tax relief, technical support and permission to cultivate unoccupied lands.⁷ Dessalegn Rahmato, the noted Ethiopian expert on that country's peasants, characterizes the peasant's "crisis of livelihood" as a "dramatic manifestation of a disease" that

⁵ John Markakis and Nega Ayele, Class and Revolution in Ethiopia (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1978), p. 55.

⁶ See Michael Stahl, Ethiopia: Political Contradictions in Agricultural Development, pp.9, 61, 88; Bahru Zewde, "Hayla Sellassie: From Progressive to Reactionary," in Abebe Zegeye and Siegfried Pausewang, eds., Ethiopia in Change, p.41. Michael Stahl has argued against the consideration of Ethiopian peasants as a homogeneous group. He places them in four distinct but overlapping categories: landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants and poor peasants. Landlords included people who owned so much land (above 20 hectares) that they did not have to cultivate the land, but could live on rent from leased land. Rich peasants included those who practised agriculture and owned between 10 and 20 hectares of additional land, some of which they leased to tenants. Middle peasants were those who had between 3 and 10 hectares of land and often cultivated them. Poor peasants had the smallest plots of land, often 3 hectares or less.

⁷ Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and its Hinterlands: The Political Economy of Land Tenure, Agriculture and Food Supply for Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: 1887-1974," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Boston University, 1995, p. 398. See also Michael Stahl, Ethiopia: Political Contradictions in Agricultural Development, p. 9.

afflicted Ethiopia for centuries.⁸ "But what was the disease?," to echo Gwin Prins's famous question.⁹

This chapter examines why the Imperial Government embraced post-World War II ideas of agricultural development which favoured a selective and limited expansion of commercial agriculture, but failed to protect poor peasants against famine. While its conclusions converge with Stahl's and Bahru's observations, they highlight how domestic and international factors shaped the attitude of the Imperial Government towards agriculture. It argues that Ethiopians shared the global aspiration for development in the post-1950 period, but that the Imperial Government's commitment to develop was half-hearted. Development represented a mode of knowledge and organization that challenged the ideological foundations of Imperial Ethiopian society.¹⁰ Developing an agrarian society through comprehensive land reform and alteration of power structures accentuated the Emperor's fears

⁸ Dessalegn Rahmato, "The Crisis of Livelihood in Ethiopia," Paper Presented at the Eleventh General Conference of the International Peace Research Association, University of Sussex, England, 13-18 April 1986, p. 1.

⁹ Gwin Prins, "But What Was the Disease?" Past and Present, no. 124 (1989): 159-179.

¹⁰ See Gustavo Esteva, "Development," in Wolfgang Sachs, ed., The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1995), pp.6-7; Michael Watts, "A New Deal in Emotions": Theory and Practice and the Crisis of Development," in Jonathan Crush, ed., Power of Development (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp.48-50; M.P. Cowen and R.W. Shenton, Doctrines of Development (London: Routledge, 1996), p.455.

about the survival of Ethiopia's ancient monarchy. The approach of the IEG to development in agriculture especially highlighted the limited growth and the gradual change that it desired in the era of development and modernization. The Emperor's strategy sought to prevent a backlash similar to the reaction against the White Revolution which helped to depose the Shah of Iran.¹¹

Ethiopia's historical experiences also shaped the Imperial Government's approach to development. Despite fighting to maintain its sovereignty during the European colonization of Africa, Ethiopia pursued its own policy of imperial territorial expansion.¹² Like Britain and France in West Africa in the nineteenth century, Ethiopia's imperial creed embodied a claim to govern any people or territory which the emperors could bring under their control by conquest or cession. The independence in 1961 of British and Italian Somaliland, and their unification, challenged Ethiopia's control over the Somali inhabitants of the Ogaden region, in southeastern Ethiopia. In the absence of dependable external

¹¹ For a detailed analysis of the White Revolution, see James A. Bill, The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 144-147, 150-153.

¹² Patrick Gilkes, The Dying Lion: Feudalism and Modernization in Ethiopia (New York: St Martin's Press, 1975), pp. 13-15; Addis Hiwet, Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution (London: The Review of African Political Economy, 1975), pp. 1-3; Ministry of Agriculture, "Report of the Task Force on the Reorganization and Strengthening of the Ministry of Agriculture," 3 September 1969, Ministry of Agriculture Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa.

allies, and lacking a reliable source of weapons to preserve itself at this critical historical juncture, the Imperial Ethiopian Government forged domestic security alliances.

Control over land and food supply provided it with the mechanisms to create political balance and also to protect the economic privileges of its domestic political allies. The intent of the Imperial Government to control the scope, pace and direction of change in Ethiopia's most significant economic sector explains why Imperial Ethiopia embraced the ideology of development, but failed to develop agriculture to the point of preventing famine.

The Environment As A Basis for Development

Ethiopia's 124.8 million hectares of land make it one of the largest countries in Africa.¹³ It embraces an area equal in size to the combined areas of the American states of California, Oregon, Washington and Idaho.¹⁴ While a generalization about Ethiopia's agricultural potential is difficult to make, development economists have judged its capacity for growth to be "generally better than many African

¹³ Ministry of Agriculture, Planning and Programming Department, "Food Crop Development Information," July 1978, p.1.

¹⁴ S.B. Fracker, Chairman of the Agricultural Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, to the Food and Agricultural Inter-Agency Committee on Locust Control, 10 February 1956, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), 875.49/2-1056, Box 4881.

countries."¹⁵ The rugged topography and the varied vegetation of northern Ethiopia limit the amount of arable land that can be cultivated in any given area.¹⁶ Only parts of the central and southwestern provinces of Shoa, Arsi and Keffa have relatively good soil and favourable weather conditions that permit the use of tractors for food production. Much of the land in southern Ethiopia is dry and only useful for pastoral activities.¹⁷

Rainfall is a crucial factor in Ethiopian agriculture. The two rainy seasons, *Belg* and *Meher*, play significant roles in the production of food and the breeding of animals. People in Wollo, Shoa and Bale provinces produce about 50 percent of their food needs with the aid of the minor rainy season, the *Belg*, which normally lasts from February to May. While peasants in Gojjam, Gondar, Eritrea and Hararghe do not depend heavily on the *Belg* season for their crops, those in Sidamo, parts of Tigray and Gamo Gofa provinces rely on it for the

¹⁵ World Bank, "Ethiopian Agriculture: A Strategy for Growth," Confidential Report No. 6512 ET., Sector Review, Vol. 1 (25 March 1987): 13.

¹⁶ S.B. Fracker, Chairman of the Agricultural Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, to the Food and Agricultural Inter-Agency Committee on Locust Control, 10 February 1956, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), 875.49/2-1056, Box 4881.

¹⁷ U.S. Operation Mission to Ethiopia (USOM-E), "Point Four Report: The Agriculture of Ethiopia," Vol. 1 (1954): 12, 37.

production of wheat, millet, *teff*, barley and sorghum.¹⁸ In normal years, the Belg crops which are harvested between June and July account for about 20 percent of national food production. Belg harvests often sustain peasants until the main harvest in November and December, which depends on the long June to September rainy season, the *Meher*. Pastoralists in the south and south-west require the Belg rains to support the breeding of their animals. Under favourable climatic conditions, the *Meher* rains account for about 80 percent of national food production. Irregular *Meher* rain can gravely affect food production, pasture and access to drinking water. Beside the uneven soil fertility and variable topography and rainfall, the prevalence of animal and human diseases complicates the lives of poor peasants struggling for survival in an agrarian economy dependent on rain.

While analysis of food production in Ethiopia should not overlook the impact of environmental factors, Ethiopian peasants are not held captive by the forces of nature. Throughout the centuries, they developed agricultural techniques suited to the land they cultivated. In the highland regions of northern Ethiopia, where poor soil structure deprived farmers of sufficient groundwater, peasants used hoes and ox-drawn wooden ploughs with metal tips to cultivate

¹⁸ Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, "Drought Situation in Ethiopia and Assistance Requirements: 1984," Addis Ababa, January 1984, pp.1-5.

food.¹⁹

Access to food in Ethiopia depends on success in its distribution as well as in its production. Modernization has not prevented the continued use of donkeys, mules, camels and horses as important means of transporting food from farms to markets in Ethiopia. Peasants breed livestock not only as sources of food, but also as means of producing food in a plough economy and distributing it in rural areas.²⁰ Pastoralists also sell or exchange their livestock for cereals to supplement their milk diets.

While environmental factors influenced the production of food and the pace of its distribution in Ethiopia, cultural diversity shaped the patterns of food consumption. Some widely cultivated crops are not consumed in the form and quantity that economists would prefer. Amhara and Tigrean Coptic Christians of the northern highlands are the strictest observers of particular food consumption habits. Their religious fast days total "half the number of days in the year."²¹ The nomadic Danakil, Borana and Somali ethnic groups,

¹⁹ Author's tape interview with Richard Pankhurst, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, 13 February 1995. Richard Pankhurst is the author of The History of Famine and Epidemics in Ethiopia Prior to the Twentieth Century.

²⁰ Michael Stahl, Ethiopia: Political Contradictions in Agricultural Development, pp. 79-80.

²¹ Food and Agricultural Organization, "A Policy and Action Plan For Strengthening National Food Security in Ethiopia," in World Food Program Country Reports, November 1974, p.14.

in northern and southeastern Ethiopia, depend less on grain than on milk products derived from their livestock. *Teff* is the most widely grown and a preferred national food crop for the preparation of the national dish, *injera*. Wheat, which is mainly grown in the central provinces of Shoa and Arsi, occupies a minor place in Ethiopia's food consumption. Although Ethiopian barley has higher yields than its American cousin, its importance lies in its use by many Ethiopians for brewing *tala*, a local beer. Barley serves as a food supplement mainly in the central and northern highlands, where it thrives in better drained soils. Maize is the chief crop in eastern and south-western Ethiopia. *Ensete* is a root food crop confined to the south-western highlands while different species of pulses and oilseeds are grown and consumed in most parts of Ethiopia as food supplements.²² Given Ethiopia's diverse physical and social environment, the development of agriculture requires not only investments in irrigation and pest control, but also good government and policies to transform cultural habits and the structure of access to land.

The process of empire-building and the exercise of power affected the scope, pace and direction of agricultural transformation in Imperial Ethiopia. As the Ethiopian historian Gebru Tareke has argued, authority in the

²² RRC, "Situation in Drought-Affected Areas in Ethiopia," April 1976, RRC Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa, pp.5-7.

patrimonial Ethiopian state was highly personalized.²³ The Ethiopian historian Bahru Zewde goes further to argue that Ras Tafari Makonnen promoted the myth of his divinity, after his coronation as Emperor Haile Sellassie I in 1930.²⁴ Emperor Haile Sellassie saw his life and Ethiopia's fate as inseparable. Fealty to him became the basis for the promotion and demotion of his officials.²⁵

By the turn of the twentieth century, participation in Ethiopian politics depended on the acceptance of certain basic principles, which the state articulated as the traditions or core values of the empire. They included acceptance of Amharic as the official language, Christianity as the official religion and the Emperor as the symbol of national identity, the leading source of authority and the theoretical owner of all lands in the empire. Imperial hubris dictated the extreme

²³ Gebru Tareke, Ethiopia: Power and Protest, Peasant Revolts in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 50-51. See also John H. Spencer, Ethiopia at Bay: A Personal Account of the Haile Sellassie Years (Algonac, Michigan: Reference Publications, 1984), pp. 121-123, 114-137; Christopher Clapham, Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.22; Michael Stahl, Political Contradictions in Agricultural Development, pp.66-70; Patrick Gilkes, The Dying Lion, p. xviii.

²⁴ Bahru Zewde, A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1974 (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 1991), pp.202, 231. See also Bahru Zewde, "Hayla Sellassie: From Progressive to Reactionary," in Abebe Zegeye and Siegfried Pausewang, eds., Ethiopia in Change: Peasantry, Nationalism and Democracy (London and New York: British Academic Press, 1994), p.41.

²⁵ Author's tape interview with Tadesse Tamrat, Professor of Ethiopian history, Department of History, Addis Ababa University, 23 November 1995.

centralization of decision-making, a political practice that engendered hesitation and sycophancy at all levels of the Imperial bureaucracy.²⁶

Land, Power and Agricultural Development

Prior to March 1975, two types of land-tenureship, *rist* and *gult*, existed in Ethiopia. *Rist* was the dominant system of land-holding in the northern highlands of Ethiopia. As heritable lineage property, claimants subjected *rist* lands to division as frequently as any descendant of those lineage groups could assert rights to them. Many peasants in the *rist* regions of the north held not more than ten hectares of land. Frequent litigation over the size and location of land robbed *rist* land holders of absolute title to their land. Moreover, peasants who cultivated small plots of insecure land had neither the desire to increase output beyond subsistence nor the incentive to improve their holdings.²⁷ Centuries of cultivating small plots of marginal fertility, within the institutional constraints of *rist* land-tenure, exposed the northern peasants of Wollo, Eritrea and Tigray to cyclical famine and starvation.

²⁶ James McCann, From Poverty to Famine in Northeast Ethiopia: A Rural History, 1900-1935 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), p.202; Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, 1958-1977 (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1986), pp. 43, 104, 107-8; Bahru Zewde, A History of Ethiopia, pp. 196, 202.

²⁷ Imperial Ethiopian Government, Third Five Year Development Plan (1968-1973), pp. xiii-8.

The Emperor granted *gult* lands as a form of reward to people whose "services to the empire" earned them the Emperor's "special grace."²⁸ Since Haile Sellassie could not afford to diminish the reward for loyal services to him by giving infertile land to the politically important, he offered large tracts of the most fertile land in the empire, mostly in the central and southern provinces, to members of the privileged group of patriots and Imperial loyalists. To the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, from which he obtained his sanctity and, therefore, political legitimacy, he offered *semon* land, a type of *gult*, which the church held in perpetuity.²⁹ Although very little data exists to clarify the popular perception that the Church owned one-third of the land in Ethiopia, it is probable that as the fount of religious doctrine and overseer of imperial coronations, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church owned a considerable quantity of some of the best lands.³⁰

To lose land or not to own a piece of it is to lose one's being in rural Ethiopia. In Ethiopia's semi-feudal society, social status and opportunities for appointment to higher office resided in the size and quantity of landholdings as well as the number of one's tenants. That was the case

²⁸ Michael Stahl, Political Contradiction in Agricultural Development, pp. 66-67.

²⁹ Patrick Gilkes, The Dying Lion: Feudalism and Modernization in Ethiopia (New York: St Martin's Press, 1975), pp.3-4, 16-20, -55-57.

³⁰ Ibid.

until the late 1960s when the mechanization of agriculture caused many landowners to evict their tenants. The Emperor himself was a large landlord and derived part of his status from the great quantity of land which he owned as the monarch.³¹

People who had little or no land entered into various tenancies with landlords to maintain a modicum of dignity and subsistence. Some landlords paid no attention to the vulnerability of food production in Ethiopia to the vagaries of nature in their sharecropping contracts. *Gult* landowners in southern Ethiopia operated sharecropping arrangements which often took one-third or one-half of the annual produce of their tenants. Some landlords evicted their tenants at will encouraged by a land tenure system that lacked legal guarantees to protect the tenant from such arbitrary evictions. The looming fear of eviction compelled many tenant peasants to exceed their tenancy obligations by offering gifts and free labour services to their landlords in order to retain their favour. In many cases, tenants transported food, at their own expense, from the provinces to their landlords in the capital, Addis Ababa.³² These inherent flaws in the

³¹ John Michael Cohen, "Rural Change in Ethiopia: A Study of Land, Elites, Power and Values in Chilalo Awraja," unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Colorado, 1973, p.258; Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," p.348; author's interview with Tadesse Tamrat, Department of History, Addis Ababa University, 23 November 1995.

³² Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," pp. 299, 320, 350-1.

acquisition and use of land in the *gult* land-holding regions of the south penalised hard work and improvement of the land by tenant-peasants instead of rewarding it.³³

Until March 1975, when the Revolutionary Government nationalized all lands in Ethiopia, as we shall discuss in chapter five, those who constituted the Imperial Ethiopian Government came from the privileged class of landlords and Imperial supporters. The Vice-Minister of Agriculture in the 1950s, *Balambaras Mahteme Selassie Wolde Maskal*, owned many hectares of land under grain cultivation. His resolute opposition to land reform became a subject of discussion in the American Embassy in Addis Ababa.³⁴ Ras Kassa Hailu, one of the highest noblemen of the empire, who died in 1956, administered lands in Shoa, Arsi, and other provinces from his residence in Addis Ababa. The will of Ras Abebe Aregay, a former Minister of Defence who was killed during the December 1960 coup attempt, revealed his ownership of hundreds of acres of land, beside 2,500 quintals of teff he stored at his

³³ Author's tape interviews with Richard Pankhurst, Addis Ababa University, 13 February 1995; Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Addis Ababa, 8 March 1995 and Dessalegn Rahmato, Institute of Development Research, Addis Ababa University, 19 March 1995. See also Dessalegn Rahmato, Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia (Uppsala: SIAS, 1984), p.26.

³⁴ See George R. Merrell, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, No. 86, 19 April 1950, "Recent Developments in the Agricultural Field in Ethiopia," USNA, RG 166, Box 141, 875.20/4-1950.

residence in Addis Ababa.³⁵

In the 1960s and 1970s, there were three visions of land reform in Imperial Ethiopia. Shiferaw Bekele, an historian at Addis Ababa University, has identified these as the radical, the liberal and the conservative. The radicals, comprising Ethiopian students at home and abroad, saw the redistribution of land to those who actually tilled it as the best solution to the land tenure problem in Ethiopia. The liberal land reformers, whom Shiferaw describes as "ineffective" wanted "land reform of some kind in which private land ownership...[was] recognized and...[a] ceiling imposed...." Their vision of land reform included defining and legally regulating tenancy in Ethiopia. The conservatives included those "who totally refused to accept...any change in the tenurial system and it was with this group that the Emperor seems to have identified."³⁶ The radicals were "the most vociferous" in the domestic land reform debate. It was their vision-- "land to the tiller"--that prevailed. Many of the old and young student radicals participated in the provisional government when the Imperial Government fell in September 1974. They "took an active part" in formulating and implementing the land reform proclamation of March 1975.

³⁵ Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," p.347.

³⁶ See Shiferaw Bekele, "The Evolution of Land Tenure in the Imperial Era," in Shiferaw Bekele, ed., An Economic History of Ethiopia, Volume 1: The Imperial Era, 1941-74 (Senegal: CODESRIA Book Series, 1995), pp. 122-123.

Until the radical land reform measure of 1975, the substantial food stocks which influential landlords obtained from their tenants and the steady flow of food to Addis Ababa made radical land reform measures seem unattractive to the conservative forces in the Imperial Government. This became more evident when landowners who dominated the Imperial Parliament made the legislature a barren field for the discussion of land reform issues and beneficial agricultural development plans.³⁷ As Cowan and Shenton argue, national development plans which fail to reduce hunger and poverty are not worthy of their names.³⁸

The communal land tenure systems of the north and the feudal and tenant-based economies of the south undermined food production. To raise food production, Ethiopia's government needed to survey landholdings and confirm security of land-title in the north and break-up large estates in the south, redistributing land to the tenants.

The United States in Ethiopia's Agricultural Development Plans, 1950-1957

The Imperial Ethiopian Government undertook its most significant agricultural development task with the assistance of the United States. The technical agreement which Ethiopia

³⁷ Bahru Zewde, A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1974 (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1991), p. 195.

³⁸ See M.P. Cowen and R.W. Shenton, Doctrines of Development (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 447.

and the United States signed on 16 June 1951 aimed at:

assisting the efforts of the people of Ethiopia to develop their agricultural and related resources, to improve their working and living conditions and to further their social and economic progress.³⁹

American agricultural aid provided an opportunity for the Imperial Government to develop Ethiopia's agriculture in order to put more food in the hands of peasants. But post-World War II American development ideas, which emphasized change in Ethiopia's agricultural economy, threatened the centrality of the existing land distribution practices in the maintenance of Imperial power. Haile Sellassie's desire to preserve "tradition" and his quest for "a uniquely Ethiopian" concept of development showed how his government resisted any change in Ethiopia's agriculture which undermined the privileges of the landed elite and Imperial loyalists even if such opposition to change had dire consequences for peasants.⁴⁰

The IEG accepted American development assistance under the American Point Four Program in order to strengthen relations with the United States rather than to open Ethiopia to American influence. The proposals which the IEG made for

³⁹ See "Point Four General Agreement For Technical Cooperation Between the United States of America and the Ethiopian Empire," 16 June 1951, USNA, RG 166: FASNR (1950-1954), Ethiopia: International Agreements, Box 141 A, Entry 5.

⁴⁰ See "The Emperor's Coronation Day Address of November 2, 1962," Ethiopia Observer, 6, no.4 (1963): 299; "The Emperor Haile Sellassie I's Speech on the Opening of Parliament Delivered on November 2nd, 1964," Ethiopia Observer, 8, no.4 (1965): 274.

American agricultural development assistance in 1950 revealed that its priorities differed significantly from American priorities. It sought American aid to advance education, locate mineral deposits, register lands, to conduct livestock censuses and to improve marketing standards.⁴¹ It was not until the late 1960s that the Imperial Government paid attention to peasant agriculture.

A request for American assistance in instituting standards for grading cereals dovetailed with the interest of Imperial officials who produced grain for export and needed to meet intensive competition in the markets of Europe and the Middle East. Grain exports became the focus of the economic policy of the Imperial Government in the immediate post-war period.⁴² The profitable export of grains, however, obscured cyclical starvation in rural Ethiopia, as we shall note in our discussion of famine and the politics of relief in Imperial Ethiopia in chapter three.

Requests for American agricultural aid as a tool for development never meant that the Imperial Ethiopian Government

⁴¹ See "Point Four Agreement Signed With Ethiopia," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. 25, (2 July 1951): 18, and George R. Merrel, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, No. 117, 16 November 1950, "Grains in Ethiopia," USNA, RG 59, DF-(1950-1959), Box 5387, 879.231/11-1650.

⁴² See George R. Merrel, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, No. 117, 16 November 1950, "Grains in Ethiopia," USNA, RG 59, DF (1950-1959), Box 5387, 879.231/11-1650; Richard D. Gatewood, Charge d'Affaires ad interim, American Embassy, No. 212, 27 February 1951, "Grains", 875.231/2-2751. USNA, RG 59, DF 1950-1954, Box 5387.

accepted American arguments that hunger and poverty in Ethiopia would encourage its peasants to resort to communism. While the Emperor agreed that "communism posed a grave danger to world peace," he denied that Ethiopia was so poor or so prone to hunger as to make Communism attractive to the peasants. As the Emperor put it, "Communism thrives where there is poverty. Thank God we are not so poor. Our people own their own land and have enough food."⁴³ However, our investigation of the condition of peasants in Ethiopia in chapter three reveals a completely different picture.

The Imperial Government refused to admit that Ethiopia had fallen into misery which required American economic assistance to transform Ethiopian society. Ethiopian officials showed their hostility to the exposure of poverty and hunger in the empire by interpreting them as natural disasters only temporarily affecting "a rich and fertile empire."⁴⁴ The glorification of Ethiopia's natural environment and "immense...agricultural wealth" by the Imperial Government

⁴³ See C.L. Sulzberger, "Ethiopia Approves Area Defence Pact--Emperor Says She Would Join Any Middle East Grouping Tied to Atlantic Body," New York Times, 21 December 1952, p. 18 L.

⁴⁴ Haile Sellassie I, "Radio Messages from Guenet Leul Palace on 28 August 1959 and on 18 September 1959," Addis Ababa: Ministry of Information, 1959, pp. 24, 27; "Haile Sellassie I's Speech on Ethiopia's Second Five Year Plan and Envisaged Land Reform," Ethiopia Observer, 6, no.4 (1963): 297; "Speech on the Opening of Parliament, 2 November 1962," Ethiopia Observer, 8, no.4 (1965): 276; "Speech on the Opening of the Ethiopian Parliament, 2 November 1972," Ethiopia Observer, 15, no.4 (1973): 198.

created a false image of Ethiopia, but one which was accepted as the truth.⁴⁵ In fact, Ethiopia's international development partners, including the United States, eventually accepted and propagated the image of Ethiopia that the Imperial Government presented.

The image of prosperity was a subterfuge which Ethiopia's ruling elite contrived to counter the post-1950 concepts of development. The persistent invocation of Ethiopia's independent heritage by the Emperor and the respect it was accorded by Ethiopia's international development partners granted the Imperial Government the latitude it sought to determine the scope, pace and direction of agricultural development.⁴⁶

Pre-World War II experiences and post-war domestic developments played key roles in the Emperor's positioning of "security and internal peace" at the centre of "the task of development and nation-building."⁴⁷ While victory over Italian

⁴⁵ Dessalegn Rahmato, "Neither Feast nor Famine: Prospects for Food Security," in Abebe Zegeye and Siegfried Pausewang, eds., Ethiopia in Change, pp.192-3. See also author's interview with Dessalegn Rahmato, Institute of Development Research, Addis Ababa University, 19 March 1995.

⁴⁶ See the full text of Haile Sellassie's important coronation speech delivered in the Ethiopian Parliament, "Ethiopian Achievements and Objectives," 3 November 1960, Ethiopia Observer, 5, no.1 (1961): 7, and also "Ethiopia's Role in Emergent Africa," an address by Lij Endalkatchew Makonnen, Ambassador of Ethiopia at the Court of St. James delivered to the University of Manchester on 4 November 1960, Ethiopia Observer, 5, no. 1 (1961): 12.

⁴⁷ See "The Emperor Haile Sellassie I's Speech From the Throne," Ethiopia Observer, 12, no. 1 (1969): 4.

forces in 1896 became a major part of the Ethiopian national story, the memory of the Emperor's response to the second Italian invasion of Ethiopia, in 1936, echoed with dissonance. Sections of the Ethiopian aristocracy never forgave Haile Sellassie for seeking exile in Britain rather than accepting martyrdom leading his troops against the Italian forces.⁴⁸ A powerful counter to the story of the Emperor's resistance to Italy, this criticism simmered below the surface, ready to emerge when the timing was right.

Furthermore, inequalities in land-holding continued to generate serious grievances, while the core traditions of the empire ignored them. Revolts by peasants in the provinces and their use by aggrieved aristocrats to challenge Imperial authority deepened ethno-nationalist feelings in Ethiopia's multi-ethnic empire.⁴⁹ In the post-1950 period, Haile Sellassie could not maintain political stability without employing myths, force and diplomacy to resolve the situations which geography, ethnicity, religion and history produced in his empire. The Imperial Government concluded economic agreements with foreign governments under the guise of developing

⁴⁸ Author's tape interview with Abba Yimer Woraki, 72 years of age and a famous oral historian, Dessie, Wollo, Ethiopia, 19 October 1995. See also Patrick Gilkes, The Dying Lion, p. 17.

⁴⁹ See Gebru Tareke, Ethiopia: Power and Protest, Peasant Revolts in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Mesfin Wolde Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, p.16 and author's interview with Mesfin Wolde Mariam, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 8 March 1995.

Ethiopia's agriculture, while considering that "the greatest...threat to Ethiopia ...[was] political..., namely the campaign for the dismemberment of [the Ethiopian empire]." ⁵⁰

Emperor Haile Sellassie hoped that an alliance with the United States would provide him with diplomatic and military security. Ethiopia courted the support of the United States through participation in the Korean War. It also granted the United States the right to operate a military communications installation at Kagnev in Asmara, Eritrea, for a period of twenty-five years starting in 1953, and backed U.S. opposition to the admission of the People's Republic of China to membership in the United Nations through its voting in the U.N. General Assembly. However, the United States did not always extend reciprocal diplomatic and military support to Ethiopia.⁵¹ Haile Sellassie did not hide his displeasure at the failure of the United States to provide Ethiopia with military assistance that he deemed adequate to meet "the burden of

⁵⁰ Imperial Ethiopian Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Memorandum," Addis Ababa, 12 March 1957, USNA, RG 59, Lot File No.57, D616, Box 13.

⁵¹ See "Ethiopia Sends Troops To Korea," Department of State Bulletin (hereafter cited as DSB), Vol. 34, No.617 (30 April 1951): 709. Ethiopia sent a contingent of 1,069 soldiers to fight alongside British, Canadian and American troops in Korea. It also provided food and US \$100,000 to maintain U.N. soldiers in Korea. Ethiopia probably did this to present itself as devoted to the principle of "collective security" and, therefore, deserving of a key voice in post-World War II international affairs.

national defence."⁵²

Washington's refusal to support the Emperor's request to the United Nations for the incorporation of the U.N. Trust Territory of Somaliland (former Italian Somaliland) into Ethiopia in 1956 dismayed the Emperor.⁵³ His threats to review Ethiopia's relations with the United States, during his private meeting with visiting American envoy James P. Richards, in April 1957, confirmed that by 1957, the Imperial Government had lost confidence in the United States as an external security ally.⁵⁴

From 1957 onwards, the U.S. National Security Council believed that Ethiopian cooperation with American officials on agricultural development matters depended on the delivery of

⁵² See Imperial Ethiopian Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Summary of Remarks Made By His Imperial Majesty At Audience Granted on 12 March 1957 to the Vice President of the United States," and also Embassy of the United States of America "Aide Memoire for James P. Richards, Special Assistant to the President of the United States," 17 April 1957, USNA, RG 59, Lot File No.57, D616, Box 13.

⁵³ Ironically, it was the USSR and the Soviet bloc countries which supported Ethiopia's request. See National Security Council, "U.S. Policy Toward the Horn of Africa," 4 November 1959, USNA, RG 273: Records of the National Security Council, Policy Paper Files NSC 5903, and also Imperial Ethiopian Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Memorandum," Addis Ababa, 12 March 1957, USNA, RG 59, Lot File No.57, D616, Box 13.

⁵⁴ Embassy of the United States of America "Aide Memoire for James P. Richards, Special Assistant to the President of the United States," 17 April 1957, USNA, RG 59, Lot File No.57, D616, Box 13; author's interview with Tesfaye Mekasha, former Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Imperial Ethiopian Government, Addis Ababa, 30 July 1995.

American military equipment to Ethiopia.⁵⁵ Haile Sellassie's visit to Moscow, in 1959, and his acceptance of a Soviet development loan of 400 million roubles, was a political act meant to demonstrate to American officials that while Ethiopia found Soviet communism unattractive, it viewed Moscow as an alternative source of military assistance.⁵⁶

Security and Controlled Agricultural Development, 1957-1967

The approach of the Imperial Government to development in the 1950s reflected the dominant view of development in the West which emphasized industrialization. In the realm of agricultural development, modernization theorists favoured large-scale mechanized commercial farming over subsistence peasant agriculture.⁵⁷ These post-World War II ideas of development favoured the direction of change that the Ethiopian Government desired. As Dessalegn Rahmato argues, the Imperial Government's approaches to development "had a clear

⁵⁵ In FY 1958 (October 1957 to October 1958), the United States delivered three T-33 jet trainers and one C-47 plane with support equipment while offering to train Ethiopian pilots in the United States. In June 1958, it added twelve F-86 jet fighter planes. For confirmation of the NSC's belief, see National Security Council, "Operating Coordinating Board Report On U.S. Policy Toward Ethiopia NSC 5615\1," 9 July 1958, USNA, RG 273, OCB Progress Report on NSC 5615\1.

⁵⁶ See the Emperor's radio message broadcast from the Guenet Leul Palace on 28 August 1959, p.19.

⁵⁷ Dessalegn Rahmato, "Peasant Agriculture Under the Old Regime," in Shiferaw Bekele, ed., An Economic History of Ethiopia, Volume 1: The Imperial Era, 1941-74 (Senegal: CODESRIA Book Series, 1995), p.147.

class bias: they favoured the landlord and...the emerging capitalist farmer."⁵⁸

Ethiopia's post-1950 agricultural development plans revealed a carefully skewed selection of development targets. National security mattered more than the potential of agricultural policy to eradicate hunger and improve the living conditions of Ethiopian peasants. Imperial budget allocations in 1953 ranked security and education above agriculture in national policy-making. The Ethiopian Birr 884,260 allocated to agriculture paled in significance next to the 14,053,583 allocated to the Ministry of the Interior, the 13,489,714 granted to the Ministry of War and the 10,055,424 provided to the Ministry of Education.⁵⁹

Ethiopia's First Five Year Development Plan (FFYDP:-1957-62) lacked any strategy to increase food production, reduce poverty, improve access to land and reform the exploitative landlord-tenant relationships. It accorded primacy to infrastructural and industrial development, thereby minimizing its significance as a development plan for Ethiopia's poor peasants.⁶⁰ The IEG promoted the establishment of textile mills

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.144.

⁵⁹ See Joseph Simonson (?), U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, No. 181, 21 December 1953, "Transmitting Ethiopian Budget: 11 September 1952 to 10 September 1953," USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.10/12-2153.

⁶⁰ Oliver L. Troxel, Jr., First Secretary of American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, No. 167, "Weekly Economic Review: Week Ending 8 November 1957," 12 November 1957, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, Box 4879, 875.00/11-1257.

because of the availability of cotton and cheap labour. However, many of the industries, including flour-milling, saw-milling, tanning, shoe manufacturing, beer, textiles, glass and bottle-making, were owned and managed by expatriates.⁶¹

In the 1950s, the IEG hoped that it could improve agriculture and enhance the distribution of food by building industries, developing roads and communication systems. In official thinking, industries were superior to agriculture and would place Ethiopia on a par with the more advanced countries.⁶² But the transition to an industrial economy required capital, which only a liberal business climate, a stable political atmosphere and support for private enterprise could ensure.⁶³

The First Five Year Development Plan gave concrete expression to the IEG's approach to development. Its most notable investments in agriculture occurred in the commercial production of cash crops such as coffee, sugar cane, cotton and tobacco.⁶⁴ Land reform measures under the plan did not go

⁶¹ The author obtained this information in his correspondence with Tafara Deguefe, former head of the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia. Tafara Deguefe served the Imperial regime for twenty years. He was the leading banker in Ethiopia in the 1950s and 1960s.

⁶² Author's correspondence with Tafara Deguefe, former head of the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia.

⁶³ Tafara Deguefe, former head of the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, to the author, 24 August 1997.

⁶⁴ Planning Commission Office, *Restricted*, "Outline for the Fourth Five Year Plan (1974-1978)," April 1973, Ministry of Agriculture Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa, p.1.2.

beyond the proposal to conduct cadastral surveys of available land and vague proclamations by the Emperor in November 1958 and September 1959 to give a gasha of land (40 hectares) to every unemployed Ethiopian and landless peasant.⁶⁵ Neither of the Imperial land proclamations of 1958 and 1959 granted poor peasants security over land nor relieved them from exploitative share-cropping tenancies. In fact, the Emperor and his officials, who were committed to maintaining the prevailing land tenure system, used the periodic proclamations as subterfuges to avoid changing the methods of acquiring land and regulating relations between tenants and landlords.

An important distinction should be made between Imperial land proclamations and a commitment to pursue their contents. In the 1950s, Haile Sellassie tailored his proclamations to present a facade of modernity including a hollow commitment to land reform for Ethiopia's international development partners. The land proclamations obscured the link between the precarious livelihood of tenant-peasants and the land tenure system.⁶⁶ They suggested that considerable idle arable land existed in Ethiopia for any one who seriously wanted to use it. To external listeners, the liberal tone of the land

⁶⁵ See "Radio Messages Broadcast From Guenet Leul Palace on September 18, 1959, by His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I," p. 27, and "Ethiopia's Second Five Year Plan and Envisaged Land Reform: The Emperor's Speech," Ethiopia Observer, 6, no.4 (1963): 295.

⁶⁶ Author's tape interview with Tadese Tamrat, Department of History, Addis Ababa University, 23 November 1995.

proclamations suggested the existence of a healthy investment climate.

The proclamations of the 1950s provided real benefits to patriots, members of the armed forces and the civil service.⁶⁷ About 80 percent of the land granted by Imperial Order between 1950 and 1969 went to civil servants and members of the armed forces. The landless and unemployed in whose name the proclamations were made received little or nothing.⁶⁸ Obtaining land often took four to eight years and considerable greasing of official elbows. Since no record existed of idle state land from which these grants were to be made, the Imperial Government distributed certificates to the eligible.⁶⁹ Only those who had ample financial resources and political connections could obtain the certificates and survive the lengthy litigious and bureaucratic process of acquiring land.⁷⁰ Those who obtained certificates of eligibility to receive the Imperial land then undertook the task of discovering "unoccupied" land and of contesting claims to that land with their occupants. Civil servants and members of the armed

⁶⁷ Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," p.293.

⁶⁸ See Michael Stahl, Political Contradictions in Agricultural Development, p. 64.

⁶⁹ Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," p.241. See also William Dale Fisher, First Secretary of the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, No.70, 25 September 1959, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), Box 4879, 875.00/9-2559.

⁷⁰ Michael Stahl, Political Contradiction in Agricultural Development, p. 65.

forces did not encounter these encumbrances. Their respective superiors issued their certificates directly to them.⁷¹

According to Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, the Imperial land grant system offered the state an opportunity to re-establish control over rural land, re-examine the terms under which its occupants had acquired it and redistribute land deemed to have been acquired illegally.⁷² Since many of the people who eventually acquired *gult* land were urban government employees, only a few actually farmed it. Distance compelled many of the new landlords to either sell their newly-acquired land or lease it in small parcels to tenants on a share cropping basis. Where the new landowners found "illegal occupants" on their acquired land, they either evicted them or established themselves as landlords over them and demanded rent in the form of food and other services.⁷³ Land grants to patriots, soldiers and civil servants formed part of the Emperor's strategy of building and consolidating domestic alliances to buttress the security of his reign in the absence of external security guarantees and in the midst of fear of external invasion.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," pp. 244-245, 250. The Ethiopian historian Tekalign Wolde-Mariam believes that some of the economic policies of the Revolutionary Government mirrored the "redistributive ethic" inherent in the Imperial proclamations and which had deeper roots in Ethiopian social thought.

⁷³ Michael Stahl, Political Contradiction in Agricultural Development, p. 66.

Imperial fears about the "dismemberment" of Ethiopia became more soundly based in the 1960s. The merger of the U.N. Trust Territory of Somaliland (the former Italian Somaliland, which Ethiopia sought in 1956) and British Somaliland into the Republic of Somalia, on 1 July 1960, completed the first phase of what was to become Somalia's irredentist policy in the Horn of Africa. The territorial claims of the new Republic of Somalia included the Ogaden region of northeastern Ethiopia and the Northern Frontier District of Kenya, where ethnic Somalis lived. With support from Mogadishu, Somali ethnic groups in the Ogaden demanded the conversion of the region into an independent state of Western Somalia.⁷⁴ The more nationalistic Somalis founded the Western Somalia Liberation Front (WSLF), in 1961, to wage a war of secession against the central government in Addis Ababa.⁷⁵

Ethiopia compounded its security dilemmas by annexing the federated province of Eritrea in November 1962. This annexation violated the September 1952 U.N. agreement which granted Eritrea autonomous status within Ethiopia. Far from assuaging its security dilemmas, the annexation of the strategic Red Sea corridor to Ethiopia actually fuelled the flames of secessionism within the empire and accentuated Haile

⁷⁴ See Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb, Politics and the Ethiopian Famine, 1984-1985 (Cambridge, Mass.: Cultural Survival, Inc., 1986), p. 24.

⁷⁵ For a discussion of the origins and political aims of the WSLF, see Fred Halliday and Maxime Molyneux, The Ethiopian Revolution (Woking, Great Britain: Unwin Brothers), p. 76.

Sellassie's fears about the disintegration of Ethiopia. Like the Ogadeni Somali, Eritrean nationalists established the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), in 1962, to seek independent statehood for Eritrea through armed struggle.

Regional politics fanned the flames of dissidence in Ethiopia. While leaders of the WSLF received military and diplomatic support from Somalia, Egypt's Abdul Nasser offered the leadership of the ELF sanctuary and radio broadcasting facilities to incite Eritrean nationalist feelings against the Ethiopian government. Under these circumstances, the IEG linked agricultural development even more closely to national security than it did in the 1950s.

Insecurity at home and threats of invasion from abroad distorted the IEG's agricultural policies. Agricultural development acquired significance in national policy mainly in terms of its capacity to preserve the Ethiopian empire, not for its potential to improve the living conditions of Ethiopia's peasants. Modernization in post-1950 Ethiopia was largely confined to the military and the civil service. As soldiers and government employees began to receive food as part of their salaries, control over land and the food supply became integral components of national security plans. Scholarships for agricultural education helped the Imperial Government to replace aging feudal loyalists with educated

young technocratic dependents in the modernizing bureaucracy.⁷⁶

The readiness with which the Imperial Government dissipated its trained reservoir of agricultural experts to the military and the public service while favouring commercial farmers, reflected its largely one-sided approach to agricultural development. However, in the domestic discourse on development, peasants did not escape official admonitions for sloth, a lack of industry and resistance to modernization.⁷⁷ Peasants welcomed change when they could see the potential benefits. Many adopted new production methods and switched to improved grains and breeds of poultry from the research stations at Debre Zeit and the college at Alemaya.⁷⁸ However, only the few who owned land and had the funds could purchase pesticides and imported agricultural equipment.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Irwin Eldie Siegenthaler, "An Evaluation of Jimma Agricultural Technical School Program, Jimma, Ethiopia, Based Upon A Study of Jimma Graduates," unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Oklahoma State University, May 1965, Ministry of Agriculture Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa, p. 95.

⁷⁷ See Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," pp. 396-8.

⁷⁸ Lloyd M. Adcock, Agricultural Attache, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of Agriculture, AGR.-14, 1 November 1962, "Voluntary Farmers Field Day- Oklahoma State University Contract," USNA, RG 166, FASNR (1962-1965), Ethiopia-Eritrea, Agriculture-Foreign Trade, Box 92, Entry 5.

⁷⁹ Author's tape interviews with a group of 12 elder farmers (above 65 years of age) at Kutaber woreda, North Wollo Administrative Zone, 19 October 1995; with Muhefa Ahmed (peasant, 87), Ali Mohammed (peasant, 80), Ahmed Haji (peasant, 80) in Bati, Wollo, 17 October 1995; with Berehu Gebregeorgis (peasant, 68), Muruts Wolde-Sellassie (peasant, 66), Woizero Amaresh Woldu (peasant, 70+), and Atsbi woreda, Eastern Zone of Tigray Region, 22 September 1995. See also

The Imperial Government proved to be more reactionary in terms of agricultural innovation than the peasants it lambasted. It opposed any major changes in the land tenure system and the organization of the Ministry of Agriculture. The Habte-Wolde brothers (Akalework, Aklilu and Makonnen) were the strongest opponents of land reform and fought against the reorganization of the Ministry of Agriculture. Akalework Habte-Wolde, the Minister of Agriculture in the 1960s, and a brother of the Prime Minister, welcomed international development assistance, but resisted the influence of international partners on the pace and direction of change in Ethiopia's agricultural economy.⁸⁰ Aklilu Habte-Wolde, the loyal Prime Minister, and his brother Makonnen Habte-Wolde, a former Minister of Commerce and Agriculture, opposed land reform in ways that embroiled them in conflict with the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) representative in Ethiopia, Carroll Deyoe, an American.⁸¹

Resistance to a more democratic agricultural policy and

Marcus Gordon, U.S. Director of Technical Cooperation in Ethiopia (U.S. Operation Mission to Ethiopia), to Secretary of State, 26 June 1953, USNA, RG 59, Records of G. Mennen Williams, 875.00-TA/6-2653.

⁸⁰ Lloyd M. Adcock, Agricultural Attache of the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, to U.S. Department of Agriculture, AGR 28, 2 April 1963, "Biographical Data on Minister of Agriculture," USNA, RG 166: FASNR, Box 92.

⁸¹ George R. Merrell, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, No. 86, 19 April 1950, "Recent Developments in the Agricultural Field in Ethiopia," USNA, RG 166: FASNR, Box 141, 875.20/4-1950.

broader access to land by the Emperor's circle precipitated a violent effort to overthrow his government in December 1960. Senior officers of the Imperial Bodyguard attempted to launch a revolution in the name of modernizing agriculture and resolving the inequalities between the wealth of the political elite and the poverty of the peasantry.⁸² Although the coup plotters were quickly apprehended and punished, their example and goals inspired the post-1960 Ethiopian intelligentsia.⁸³ The Imperial Government sought to diffuse the clamour by university students in Ethiopia for the reform of access to land by establishing a separate ministry of land reform to deal with the land tenure issue. It also offered verbal commitments to restructure the Ministry of Agriculture.

Unperturbed by the coup and the agitations of Ethiopian students for the reform of the land tenure system, the Imperial Government remained firmly committed to preserving "Ethiopia's traditions and way of life."⁸⁴ Rather than give "land to the tiller," as its domestic critics advocated, and

⁸² Richard Greenfield, Ethiopia: A New Political History (London: Pall Mall Press, 1967), p.402.

⁸³ Bahru Zewde has argued that Bidwaddad Nagash led the first major plot against the Emperor in 1951. The objective had been to eliminate the Emperor and establish a republic. See Bahru Zewde, "Hayla Sellassie: From Progressive to Reactionary" in Abebe Zegeye and Siegfried Pausewang, eds., Ethiopia in Change, p. 39.

⁸⁴ Haile Sellassie I, "Coronation Day Address, November 2, 1962," Ethiopia Observer, 6, no.4 (1963): 299. See also the Emperor's speech on "Ethiopia's Second Five Year Plan and Envisaged Land Reform", Ethiopia Observer, 6, no.4 (1963): 295-6.

reorganize the Ministry of Agriculture as U.S. officials in Addis Ababa urged, the Imperial Government focused its attention on research about modern methods of farming.⁸⁵ A substantial portion of its US\$ 1.6 million investment in agriculture, under the Second Five Year Development Plan (SFYDP, 1962-67), went into providing loans and extension services for commercial farmers.⁸⁶ But despite state patronage, mechanized farming, which expanded after the mid-1960s, accounted for only 7 to 10 percent of total national crop output.⁸⁷

Peasants who produced teff, barley and maize, the food crops which the majority of Ethiopians consumed, had a comparative economic advantage in the domestic market over commercial farmers who produced cash crops such as cotton, sugar-cane, tobacco and wheat, which had limited significance in the dietary habits of the rural poor. Because of the focus

⁸⁵ Imperial Ethiopian Government, "Second Five Year Development Plan (1962-1967)", pp. 27, 45. The Plan legally established the Ministry of Agriculture as the sole agency responsible for agricultural policy and development.

⁸⁶ Imperial Ethiopian Government, "Second Five Year Development Plan (1962-1967)", pp.40-41. See also Lloyd M. Adcock Jr., Agricultural Attache, U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, to Secretary of Agriculture, AGR 28, 2 April 1963, "Biographical Data on Minister of Agriculture," RG 166, USNA, Box 92.

⁸⁷ See Tesfai Tecle, "The Evolution of Alternative Rural Development Strategies in Ethiopia: Implications for Employment and Income Distribution," Institute of Development Research, Addis Ababa University, 1975, p.3; Ministry of Agriculture and Settlement and Institute of Development Research, Addis Ababa University, "Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in Ethiopia," Addis Ababa, August 1978, p.13.

of their activities on export crops, commercial farmers required state support to survive.⁸⁸ As well-connected members of the governing elite, commercial farmers wielded political power which they exercised to influence agricultural development policy. In their efforts to benefit from the production and marketing of export crops, Ethiopian commercial farmers became ardent supporters of the existing land tenure system and vocal opponents of international food aid.⁸⁹ Commercial agriculture and increased trade in exportable commodities did not induce the significant transformations in the land tenure system that American policymakers sought. Neither did the Imperial Government reorganize the Ministry of Agriculture as Point Four officials requested.

The minutes and final report of the Task Force which the IEG constituted to "reorganize" the Ministry of Agriculture reveal the Government's cavalier approach to agriculture, and the bureaucratic politics which dogged its agricultural policy.⁹⁰ The testimony of Ato Alemu Abebe, Director of the Agricultural Office of the Governorate of Beggemdir (Gondar), epitomized the critiques of provincial civil servants who did not conceal their distaste for the neglect of agriculture in their jurisdictions by their superiors in the capital. As Ato

⁸⁸ Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," p.424.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.392.

⁹⁰ Imperial Ethiopian Government, "Third Five Year Development Plan (1968-1973), p. xiii-7.

Alemu lamented:

As far as officials of this Ministry [Agriculture] are concerned, provincial offices were established not so much because they were important, but because...somebody said so...Provinces are only thought...[about when] epidemics or infestations take place.⁹¹

Ato Enmete Gameda, Provincial Director of the Wollega Agricultural Office, corroborated Ato Alemu's bitterness over the gulf between the provinces and the capital on agricultural policies. Enmete's disclosure that many farmers in Wollega could not cultivate their farms because their plough oxen were frequently ill would have puzzled anyone who took the Emperor's public commitments to agricultural development seriously. Enmete, who at the time of his testimony had not yet received a copy of the Second Five Year Development plan even though he was the provincial director of agriculture, courageously refused to play the sycophant:

Nobody cares or has any enthusiasm...[about] activities in the provinces...To the administrators here [Addis Ababa] the provincial officers are simple clerks who should obey orders and do nothing contrary.... If the Ministry [of Agriculture] cannot do its job properly, I humbly suggest...that...[it] be closed."⁹²

The condition of agriculture in the provinces that these two officials painted, and the tone of their testimonies, made

⁹¹ The Task Force, "Minutes of the interview with Ato Alemu Abebe, Director of Agricultural Office for Beggemdir," 19 August 1969, pp. 1-3.

⁹² The Task Force, "Minutes of the interview with Ato Enmete Gameda," 29 August 1969, p. 3.

little impact on their superiors in Addis Ababa. The final report of the Task Force simply re-affirmed Ethiopia's "unique historical identity" on a continent where foreign colonial powers had predominated. Its authors portrayed the structure and operation of the Ministry of Agriculture as a reflection of Ethiopian society, and misleadingly warned that Ethiopia:

cannot, in the attempt at modernization of her public service, dissociate herself completely from her own traditions. She can learn from world-wide experience, and choose freely from various possibilities in the...task of development..., [but] she cannot step too radically out of line with the values of her society.⁹³

The Task Force characterized its final report as describing "the basic reality" in Ethiopia. Given the recurrence of famine in many provinces after 1965, as we shall observe in chapter three, and the testimonies of provincial officials about the deterioration of peasant conditions, the recommendations were drastically out-of-line with the basic reality. The report simply reinforced the trope of Ethiopia's distinctiveness which the Emperor relentlessly promoted to control the pace of change and to diffuse domestic and international pressure for reform.

The Task Force's report was partly a response to calls by the United Nations to its members in 1962 to promote the kind of development which fulfilled "basic human needs" during the

⁹³ Ministry of Agriculture, "Report of the Task Force on the Reorganization and Strengthening of the Ministry of Agriculture," 3 September 1969, Ministry of Agriculture, Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa.

First UN Development Decade (1960-1970). The aspirations of the U.N. development decade challenged the political and economic institutions which undermined the quality of life in Ethiopia.⁹⁴ The report also pandered to the sentiments of the urban educated community which opposed foreign influence on Ethiopia.⁹⁵

Domestic and international circumstances forced the Imperial Government to broaden the scope and alter the direction of its agricultural policy in the late 1960s. Deteriorating peasant agriculture, which disrupted the urban food supply system, and shifts in the global development discourse, moving from the pre-1970 industry-based idea of modernization to the post-1970 "Green Revolution" concept, partly explain the new emphasis which the Imperial Government placed on peasant agriculture in its Third Five Year Development Plan (TFYDP, 1968-1973).⁹⁶

Towards Integrated Development, 1967-1974

The Imperial Government's interest in peasant agriculture, in the late 1960s, was a direct result of the

⁹⁴ See UN Economic and Social Council, "Proposals for Action" quoted in Gustavo Esteva, "Development" in Wolfgang Sachs, The Development Dictionary, p.13.

⁹⁵ See Ethiopian Students Union of North America (ESUNA), "Repression in Ethiopia," Reprint 5, (Cambridge, Mass.: Africa Research Group, January 1971), pp.8-11.

⁹⁶ Imperial Ethiopian Government, "Third Five Year Development Plan, 1968-1972," Ministry of Agriculture, Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa.

realization that famine posed a major threat to the government. Just as shocks in the peasant economy threatened the urban food supply, so mass death of peasants from starvation undermined Ethiopia's image in the international arena. The solutions to the problems of rural Ethiopians that the Imperial Government introduced under the TFYDP were gravely misguided.⁹⁷ It did not redistribute land to the tillers, but sought to persuade landlords to improve their relations with tenant-peasants. This route reinforced the IEG's strategy of protecting the economic privileges of its domestic allies. The Ministry of Agriculture routinely limited its extension work to farmers who had land and security of tenure.⁹⁸

Commercial farmers continued to reap the benefits of state loan schemes which the newly-established Agricultural and Industrial Development Bank (AIDB) operated. The Bank's activities represented the Government's limited support for progressive farmers, men who intended to make farming a business rather than a way of life. But that approach to agriculture, had it been more widely applied to Ethiopia's

⁹⁷ Imperial Ethiopian Government, Ministry of Agriculture, "Agricultural Development During the Third Five Year Plan: Experiences Gained and Problems Encountered," MNRDEP Archives Division, Planning and Programming File No. 5/19, p.5.

⁹⁸ See Imperial Ethiopian Government, Ministry of Agriculture, "Project Agreement Between the Government of the United States and the Government of Ethiopia: Agricultural Extension Service," Addis Ababa, 27 March 1968, MNRDEP Archives Services Division, Addis Ababa, p.7.

semi-feudal agrarian economy, would have condemned growing numbers of subsistence peasants to landlessness. Gradually, government officials came to recognize that danger.

In an agricultural economy in which the will of landlords prevailed over that of their tenants, tenant-peasants retained their high credit-risk status because of their lack of "reasonable security" over land. Tenant peasants who managed to obtain loans from the AIDB had to repay their loans in the harvest season. This requirement forced many peasants to sell the bulk of their food crops within the first months of the harvest season when prices were normally at their lowest. Peasants who depended on non-institutional sources for loans paid almost 100 percent interest to village money lenders. The systemic problems confronting peasants, coupled with tithe and tax obligations to church and state, set many of them on the road to impoverishment before the occurrence of drought cast them into the abyss of destitution.⁹⁹

Towards the end of the 1960s, the Imperial Government sought to solve two key problems: the rising frequency of famines and the inadequacy of Addis Ababa's food supply. Most of the food for Addis Ababa came from the nearby provinces of Gojjam, Shoa and Arsi. Embarrassed by the growing American

⁹⁹ Tesfai Tecle, "The Evolution of Rural Development Strategies in Ethiopia," p.58. See also author's tape interviews with Professor Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 8 March 1995 and with a group of peasants at Mertuley Maryam, Enebse Sermeder woreda, East Gojjam, 5 October 1995.

attention to the problem of famine and anxious to ensure that the population of Addis Ababa would remain politically quiet, the Emperor opened the door to the creation of a limited number of labour-intensive, commercial farms that would introduce scientific agriculture to the provinces on which Addis Ababa depended for food. An important source of the Emperor's strategy was the desire of his circle to make Ethiopia less dependent on American food relief.¹⁰⁰

The most successful pilot Green Revolution project was launched in Chilalo awraja, in Arsi Province, in September 1967. With assistance from the Swedish government, the IEG gave tenants and small farmers loans to acquire valuable inputs such as cross-bred dairy cattle, oxen for ploughing, chemical fertilizers and improved seeds. According to John Cohen and Dov Weintraub, the Comprehensive Package Program (CPP), or the Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit (CADU), was so successful that by 1971/72 more than 12,000 tenants and small scale farmers were "buying green revolution inputs through CADU credit and institutions."¹⁰¹ Seeing the profits that accrued from Green Revolution agriculture, "landowners of scale" bought inputs, mechanized their production methods and evicted their tenants. The landlords had evicted about 5,000

¹⁰⁰ See Ministry of Agriculture, "Minutes of the Meeting Held on 30 Sene 1953 [8 July 1961] About Rising Grain Prices," File No. 3715/B8, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

¹⁰¹ See John Cohen and Dov Weintraub, Land and Peasants in Imperial Ethiopia (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum & Co., 1975), p.16.

tenant-peasants by 1972.¹⁰² Without land reform, Cohen and Weintraub observe, there was no place for the evicted peasants in the countryside. More commercial agricultural ventures would have swollen the number of landless peasants flocking to towns and cities, increasing still more the pressure on the Emperor for land reform in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia could not tolerate more of the CADU projects without land reform and other programs to absorb many evicted peasants.¹⁰³ By deciding to limit foreign-funded comprehensive package programs to a small number of sites--Chilalo, in Arsi Province, and Wolamo, in Sidamo Province--the Imperial Government furthered its objective of slowing the pace of change in Ethiopia's agricultural economy.¹⁰⁴ Land reform, which was required to improve the peasant economy, threatened aristocrats and bureaucrats whose wealth, power and status depended on the prevailing land tenure system.¹⁰⁵

It was mechanization, which was an important component of the Comprehensive Package Programs, that led to the

¹⁰² Ibid., p.17.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.18.

¹⁰⁴ Tesfai Tecle, "The Evolution of Alternative Rural Development Strategies in Ethiopia: Implications for Employment and Income Distribution," Institute of Development Research, Addis Ababa University, 1975, pp. 6-7. See also John Michael Cohen, "Rural Change in Ethiopia: A Study of Land, Elites, Power and Values in Chilalo Awraja," unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Colorado, 1973, p. 196.

¹⁰⁵ See John Cohen and Dov Weintraub, Land and Peasants in Imperial Ethiopia, p. 20.

widespread eviction of tenant-peasants and the displacement of nomadic communities in Arsi and Sidamo. To arrest the development of a virtual enclosure movement and to encourage safer routes to increased food production, the Imperial Government introduced the Minimum Package Programmes (MPP's) in 1971. The MPP's, launched with assistance from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), provided a minimum package of services-- fertiliser, improved seeds, short term credit and technical advice-- to small farmers over a wide area. By 1974 over forty districts had been brought under the Minimum Package Programs.¹⁰⁶

Concentration of the MPP's in the central provinces of Shoa and Gojjam from which Addis Ababa received its food supplies, appeared to be both practical and strategic.¹⁰⁷ Practically, the MPP sites had key infrastructure assets, such as roads and markets. The government ruled out the highland region of the famine-prone north-east, with its poor roads and arid terrain, as an attractive area for MPP's. Strategically, the MPP's served to induce peasants in the northern highlands to voluntarily move and resettle in the fertile central and

¹⁰⁶ Tekalign Wolde Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," p.410.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

southern provinces where the MPP sites were located.¹⁰⁸ That development had the effect of sparing the Imperial Government the task of developing the rugged plains of northern Ethiopia.

But the MPP's were soon hijacked. Local landlords, grain merchants and prominent farmers took over the leadership of the cooperatives attached to them.¹⁰⁹ Peasants who hoped to use the cooperatives to obtain credits and loans to purchase fertilizer, clashed with private merchants who viewed the cooperatives as inimical to their trade in fertilizer. The leaders of the cooperatives imposed high fees and other obligations which limited their membership to the richer strata of rural society. Tekalign has argued that by 1974 the Illu and Tulubabo farmers cooperatives in Shoa province, for instance, had become vehicles for the promotion of the interests of the local elite.¹¹⁰

Despite their limitations, the MPP's produced large quantities of wheat, sorghum and other food grains. Unfortunately, increased food production did not lead to timely and efficient deliveries of food to famine-prone regions. Northeastern and southeastern Ethiopia, which were vulnerable to famine, and where no MPP's were located, had few

¹⁰⁸ Imperial Ethiopian Government, "Third Five Year Development Plan (1968-1973), p. xxiii.

¹⁰⁹ Tekalign Wolde Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," p. 413.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 414.

good roads.¹¹¹ It was in these areas of limited access that poor peasants, who had little or no alternative sources of income, lived. The lack of good roads linking food deficit with food surplus areas and the reluctance of truck drivers to ply poorly-maintained roads limited the access of subsistence peasants in northeastern Ethiopia to food. The food shortages in the northeast developed into starvation and mass death in the early 1970s.

The Imperial Government's tilt towards subsistence agriculture as the locus of development in the early 1970s came too late to improve the conditions of the most vulnerable of Ethiopia's rural poor. By 1972, threats to the security of the Ethiopian empire from the Republic of Somalia, which had seemed acute to the Emperor in 1961 and 1962, had been eclipsed by new and more powerful threats: the menace of famine in northern Ethiopia; insurrection in the capital; and insurgencies mounted by the Eritrean Liberation Front in the north and the Western Somalia Liberation Front in the southeast. The IEG reacted, under pressure from reform-minded professionals and intellectuals, by trying to guarantee the security of tenant-peasants over land, to proscribe arbitrary evictions and to legislate compensation for evicted tenants

¹¹¹ See Experience Incorporated, "The Transportation, Processing and Storage of Ethiopian Grains and Pulses for Domestic and Export Markets," Contract No. 626, Report No. IV, Part A., May 1972, Ministry of Agriculture, Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa.

within the Third Five Year Development Plan.¹¹²

The Imperial Government realized at the beginning of 1974 that hunger in rural Ethiopia constituted the greatest challenge to its survival. However, it was ousted from power before it could finish drafting its Fourth Five Year Development Plan (FFYDP:1974-79). That plan placed the problems confronting subsistence peasants, who lacked land and resources, at the centre of national development.¹¹³

Conclusion

The roots of the improper attention given to peasant agriculture in Imperial Ethiopia were located in the political agenda of the conservative groups within the Imperial Ethiopian Government. Since the Emperor did not distinguish between the fortunes of his person and his empire, he dictated policies that converged with the interests of his conservative supporters and retainers in the making of agricultural policy. Preserving Imperial power under the conditions that prevailed in Ethiopia after World War II required the forging of domestic security alliances. Fear of creating a society of independent peasants and altered power relationships blocked

¹¹² Imperial Ethiopian Government, "Comments of the Imperial Ethiopian Government on the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development's Draft Agricultural Sector Review: Ethiopia," 9 November 1972, MNRDEP Archives Department, Addis Ababa.

¹¹³ See Planning Commission Office, "Strategy Outline for the Fourth Five Year Plan (1974-1979)," April 1973, Ministry of Agriculture, Documentation Center, Addis Ababa.

the Emperor from boldly attempting to reform agriculture. The Emperor and his faithful domestic allies unceasingly portrayed Ethiopia as a rich and fertile nation capable of becoming the breadbasket of the Middle East, despite Ethiopia's manifest incapacity to feed itself.

The Imperial Government did not present Ethiopia as a bountiful nation out of naivety about its physical environment or a lack of knowledge about the condition of its peasants. They did so out of economic and diplomatic expediency. Any serious effort to develop peasant subsistence agriculture would have required major transformations of the structure of policy-making and implementation as well as the institutions associated with food production, distribution and consumption. Furthermore, Ethiopia was recognized as "one of the world's oldest monarchies," and, in the colonial period, as a major symbol of independence and pride for people of African descent. Any admission of serious crises within its dominant economy would seriously taint this image. Explanations of hunger and the poor living conditions of subsistence peasants as temporary aberrations in a wealthy society enabled the Imperial Government to justify its preference for military assistance and to downplay the need for agricultural reform.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Department of State. "Memorandum of Conversation With Dejazmatch Zewde, Minister of Public Works, Imperial Ethiopian Government, 26 April 1956, USNA, RG 59, 875.2614/4-2656, Box 4881. See also Haile Sellassie's conversation with Ambassador James P. Richard, special assistant to the President of the United States, Addis Ababa, 17 April 1957, USNA, RG.59, Miscellaneous Lot Files. No.57. D616. Box 13.

For the Imperial Government, the crucial concern was not which development theory worked for Ethiopia, but how it helped to maintain the social and political stability of an ancient empire at a critical historical juncture. The Emperor could neither trust the loyalty of his soldiers nor rely on external military support in a changing national and international environment. Consequently, he controlled the scope, pace and direction of change in the agricultural sector to preserve himself and his government. The Imperial Government promoted commercial agriculture as the key axis of development and channelled international interest to it in order to shore up the political and social groups whose loyalty and political support preserved the state and the Throne. The more reform-minded Imperial officials neither had the authority nor the power base to force change in the peasant economy beyond the preservation of the relationship between land, social status and political power. When programs were proposed to aid the development of peasant agriculture that brought no proportionate security rewards, they lost their appeal and were seen as posing a threat to the empire.

The subordination of peasant agriculture to political calculations perpetuated famine. It misdirected the Imperial Ethiopian Government's conception and implementation of agricultural development policies. It also sabotaged the ability of the state to respond quickly and appropriately to famine. The IEG's scant attention to peasant agriculture and

its neglect of Ethiopia's domestic food supply provided the catalysts for its fall and compelled its successor regime to integrate peasant agriculture and public welfare into a redefined, but equally flawed, concept of security and nationalism.

CHAPTER TWO

UNITED STATES AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE POLICY AND POLITICS IN IMPERIAL ETHIOPIA, 1950-1974

It is declared to be the policy of the United States to aid the efforts of the peoples of economically underdeveloped areas to develop their resources and improve their working and living conditions....

Preamble of the U.S. Act for
International Development, June
1950

The task of development and nation-building can proceed unhindered only in an atmosphere of security and internal peace.

Haile Sellassie I,
Speech From the Throne,
2 November 1968

President Harry Truman's Inaugural Address of 20 January 1949 contained four principles for building an enduring peace after the turbulence of World War II. The first pledged American support for the maintenance of international security through the United Nations Organization. The second promised American financial assistance to resuscitate the-war-ravaged economy of Europe while the third committed the United States to the containment of communism as a menace to peace and security. The fourth principle or Point Four, as it came to be known, put American economic resources and technological advancement at the forefront of a crusade against hunger and poverty in underdeveloped countries.¹

¹ For Harry S. Truman's Inaugural Address of 20 January 1949, see Documents on American Foreign Relations (Princeton,

President Truman considered the fourth point as the most important of his four-fold programme of world peace. He strongly believed that world peace and security could best be preserved when hunger and misery, which had promoted militarism before World war II and created important openings for postwar communist influence were completely eliminated. The Point Four idea was inspired by the American historical experience, which taught that a stable society could be built on sound economic foundations and "that only free men, freely governed,. . .[could] make the magic of science and technology work for the benefit of human beings...."²

Truman's Point Four idea suggested that American economic prosperity and technological evolution provided model paths toward development for under-developed nations.³ The passage of the Act for International Development by Congress in June 1950 gave legal and financial backing to Truman's "bold new program for making the benefits of American...technical advancement available for the improvement and growth of

N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967).

² President Truman elaborated upon the fourth point in his Inaugural Address in a speech read on his behalf by Dean Acheson, to the National Conference on International Economic and Social Development at the Shoreham Hotel in Washington, D.C., on 9 April 1952. See United States Information Service, "Official Text, Truman Address on Point IV Program," 9 April 1952, USNA, RG 286: Records of the Agency for International Development Mission to Ethiopia, Subject Files, 1952-54, Box 2, Entry: Ethiopia.

³ See Gustavo Esteva, "Development," in Wolfgang Sachs, ed., The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1995), p.6.

underdeveloped areas."⁴ Under the Act, the United States offered financial aid and technical assistance to a number of African, Asian and Latin American countries.

This chapter examines the application of the Point Four idea to Ethiopia from 1950 to 1974. It probes the relationship between the suggestions which American policymakers made for the transformation of agriculture in Ethiopia and the agricultural policies which the Imperial Ethiopian Government pursued. It argues that the United States did not succeed in significantly influencing the agricultural policies of Imperial Ethiopia through its Point Four aid. American and Ethiopian policymakers adopted similar approaches to agricultural development, but directed them at separate goals. They endorsed a gradual pace of agricultural development oriented towards production for the market. While the American government sought to increase food supply and to transform Ethiopia into a democratic society, the Imperial Government accepted American agricultural aid to strengthen Imperial power and to bolster the security of a semi-feudal empire at a critical historical juncture.

⁴ United States Information Service, "Official Text, Truman Address on Point IV Program," 9 April 1952, Washington, D.C.

Ethiopia and Point Four in U.S. Foreign Policy

In the post World War II atmosphere of uncertainty about the outbreak of another war, the defence of Europe's African flank gained significance in American defence planning. The status of Ethiopia as a sovereign monarchy sharing a continent with the colonies of America's European allies made it central to U.S. policy. American policymakers considered a stable Ethiopia, under a friendly government, as providing a strategic spot for U.S. reconnaissance and surveillance activities along the Soviet perimeter. Helping Ethiopians to produce food and to raise their living standards provided a mutually beneficial framework for achieving some of the objectives of post-World War II American foreign policy.⁵

Besides the military significance of Ethiopia, the United States and Ethiopia shared similar political interests. These interests had been symbolically expressed through Haile Sellassie's celebrated meeting with President Roosevelt in Casablanca in February 1945 and Ethiopia's participation in the Korean war in 1950.⁶ Above all, the American view of Haile Sellassie as a progressive leader gave Ethiopia a special place in the priorities of the Truman Administration. Reverend Joseph Simonson, the American Ambassador to Ethiopia captured

⁵ See Address by the President at the National War College on "U.S. Foreign Policy in Review," Washington, D.C., 12 December 1952, Department of State Bulletin (hereafter cited as DSB), Vol. 28, (12 January 1953): 45.

⁶ See "Ethiopia Sends Troops To Korea," DSB, Vol 24, No. 617 (30 April 1951): 709.

the mood of the moment in his advice that the State Department seek to preserve the "association of the most powerful western nation with the African country of greatest prestige."⁷

As we observed in chapter one, Ethiopia perceived the significance of its relationship with the United States differently. For his own security's sake and with the aim of modernizing his army, Haile Sellassie courted the United States and encouraged the expansion of American interests in Ethiopia. To the Emperor, the United States seemed to possess an answer to the security risks which Christian Ethiopia faced from its Moslem neighbours. A partnership with Washington also counterbalanced growing British influence in Ethiopia in the immediate postwar period.⁸ While the Emperor calculated the value of a relationship with the United States in diplomatic and military terms, the United States viewed the developing partnership as an essential component of its Cold War policy. American Point Four development assistance and the cordial relations between Harry Truman and Haile Sellassie held the divergent interests of Ethiopia and the United States

⁷ Joseph Simonson to Secretary of State, No. 290, 21 April 1955, "Comments on a New Generation of Ethiopians," USNA, RG 59: British Africa (1955-1959), 875.41/4-2155, Box 4881. See also George Mennen Williams's conversation with Eli Albert Marcoux, USNA, RG 59: Records of G. Mennen Williams, 1961-66, Subject File 1961-66, Box 15, E 719.4.

⁸ Author's interviews with Tesfaye Mekasha Amare, ex-Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Imperial Government, Addis Ababa, 30 July 1995 and with Berhanu Abebe, Professor of History, Department of History, Addis Ababa University, 10 November 1995.

together.

The interest of the Truman Administration in making Ethiopia a testing ground for Point Four development assistance in Africa inevitably made the United States accommodate the security interests of the Imperial Ethiopian Government. American Point Four aid to Ethiopia in the early 1950s included military assistance to the Ethiopian armed forces. However, the administration placed much more emphasis on promoting growth in agriculture through large-scale commercial agriculture. The low priority which Washington placed on military aid arose from the insistence of the National Security Council that the United States "avoid a military build-up which would strain the Ethiopian economy...[and] lead to commitments for indefinite U.S. support."⁹

Despite the fact that it limited its military commitments, the Truman Administration saw a friendly and politically stable Ethiopia as assuring the protection of the sea and air communication facilities of Western countries in the Mediterranean region. A strong Ethiopia also provided a "base of operations" for the defence of Africa and Western shipping lanes to Asia, Europe and the Middle East in the event of war. Under a May 1953 Mutual Security Agreement (MSA) signed between the United States and Ethiopia, the United

⁹ National Security Council, "U.S. Policy Toward the Horn of Africa," USNA, RG 273, Policy Paper Files, NSC 5903, p.17.

States acquired a military radio communication station at Kagnaw, in Eritrea.¹⁰ The Kagnaw station provided additional impetus for American interest in Ethiopia.

However, the MSA did not commit the United States to the defence of Ethiopia in the event of a domestic crisis or an external invasion. Neither did the Haile Sellassie government consider it as imposing such obligations. Nevertheless, the Imperial Government expected the United States to reward Ethiopia with military equipment and provide a psychological deterrence of its potential external enemies.

The United States did not supply the extent of military aid demanded by the Imperial Government. From FY 1952 through FY 1960 the United States offered \$38 million in aid to Ethiopia. Of this amount, \$27 million was used for technical assistance to agriculture, education, public health and the survey of Ethiopia's natural resources.¹¹ Part of the reason lay in American concern that arms build up in Ethiopia might

¹⁰ Don C. Bliss, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, "Briefing Paper for Mr. Clarence Randall on United States Foreign Economic Policy in Africa," 25 March 1958, USNA, RG 273: Records of the National Security Council, Official Meeting Files, 365th Meeting, Tab D.

¹¹ National Security Council, The Operations Coordinating Board, "Progress Report on U.S. Policy Toward Ethiopia, NSC 5615/1," 18 December 1957, USNA, RG 273, Records of the National Security Council. See also Herman Kleine, Director of the U.S. Operation Mission to Ethiopia, "Briefing for Mr. Clarence B. Randall On United States Foreign Economic Policy in Africa," 25 March 1958, RG 273, Official Meeting Files, 365th Meeting, Tab F.

trigger requests for Soviet arms by Somalia, Ethiopia's neighbour, thereby creating an arms race in the Horn of Africa.¹²

The United States succeeded neither in assuaging Haile Sellassie's security fears nor in lessening tensions between Ethiopia and its neighbours. The military equipment that Washington offered served as a form of compensation for the military privileges which the Emperor granted the United States in the midst of Cold War tensions. The Truman Administration rather expected its agricultural aid to provide the economic basis for political security in an empire whose strategic importance to the United States required that it remain stable and friendly.¹³

The significance of Point Four to the achievement of American Cold War objectives meant that the Defence Department, the State Department and the Foreign Operations Administration (later called the International Cooperation Administration) shared the responsibilities for its success. But as we shall soon observe, officials of these agencies disagreed on how to address the problems affecting agriculture in Ethiopia.

¹² National Security Council, "Operating Coordinating Board Report On U.S. Policy Toward Ethiopia NSC 5615\1," 9 July 1958, RG 273: OCB Progress Report on NSC 5615\1.

¹³ Don C. Bliss, Ambassador, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, "Briefing Paper for M. Clarence B. Randall On United States Foreign Economic Policy in Africa," 25 March 1958" USNA, RG 273, Official Meeting Files, 365th Meeting, Tab D.

The United States and Ethiopian Agriculture

The U.S. State Department instructed the American Embassy in Addis Ababa to seek proposals on "grassroot" development projects from the Imperial Government on 20 September 1950. In response, the Ethiopian Government requested assistance to build an agricultural college and primary and secondary schools, to register lands, to conduct a census of livestock in Ethiopia and survey for minerals.¹⁴ Not all Ethiopia's needs were accommodated in the resulting Point Four pact which the United States and Ethiopia concluded on 16 June 1951.¹⁵ One of the first projects which the agreement covered provided for the establishment of agricultural colleges in Ethiopia to help improve the skills of peasants and to train a new generation of commercial farmers. This agreement represented the spirit of Point Four and reflected the framework in which the United States sought to conduct its relations with Ethiopia in the post-World War II period.

Some American officials took the ideals of Point Four very seriously. Clark Clifford, President Truman's son-in-law, who had invented the idea of Point Four, George McGhee, Assistant Secretary of State for Africa and Near Eastern Affairs, and Rives Childs, the American Ambassador in Ethiopia

¹⁴ See "Point Four Agreement Signed With Ethiopia," DSB, Vol. 25, (2 July 1951): 18.

¹⁵ See "Point Four General Agreement For Technical Cooperation Between the United States of America and the Ethiopian Empire," 16 June 1951. USNA, RG 166 (1950-1954), Box 141 A, Entry 5.

in June 1951, committed themselves to making Ethiopia a model of the Point Four idea in Africa.¹⁶ W. Averrell Harriman, Special Assistant to President Truman, saw the development of the food production capacities of Ethiopian peasants and the training of a new generation of market-oriented farmers, as significant for assuring the security and political stability which the Truman Administration desired in Ethiopia.¹⁷

In the early days, Americans who were associated with the Point Four program in Ethiopia echoed the views of their Ethiopian colleagues about agriculture in the empire. In June 1952, Luther H. Brannon, ex-President of Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, and first President of the American-assisted land-grant college in Ethiopia, characterized "the fertile lands of Ethiopia" as "potentially the most productive of any presently undeveloped agricultural area in the world."¹⁸ Brannon belonged to the group of Americans who believed that

¹⁶ Rives Childs, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, No 332, 6 June 1951, USNA, RG 166, FASNR, Box 12, Entry 2B. See also Department of State, "Memorandum of Conversation: Mr Clark Clifford's Interest in Ethiopia," 4 December 1951 (?), USNA, RG 59 (1950-1955), Box 1. The participants included Mr. Clark Clifford, partner in the Washington law firm of Clifford and Miller, George McGhee, NEA and Mr Archibald Cyr, AF.

¹⁷ W. Averrell Harriman, Special Assistant to the President, "Constant Vigilance to Combat Threat of Aggression," Speech Made Before House Foreign Affairs Committee, 3 July 1951, DSB, Vol. 25 (16 July 1951): 89.

¹⁸ L.H. Brannon, Technical Cooperation Administration, "Country Evaluation Report," June 1952, USNA, RG 469, Records of U.S. Foreign Assistance Agencies, 1948-1961, Ethiopia, Box 2.

the development of Ethiopia's food production potential constituted "the most important international technical assistance task which the U.S. can undertake."¹⁹ His characterization of Ethiopia as a potential source of food for Asia and the Middle East represents the most hyperbolic example of the initial enthusiasm of American officials about Ethiopia's agricultural potential.

R.G. Gatewood, U.S. Chargé d'affaires in Ethiopia in 1953 reinforced the rosey view of Ethiopia in 1953. He viewed Haile Sellassie's Ethiopia as offering "the most rewarding area for U.S. aid" because of its "large economic potential" and "receptivity" to the United States.²⁰ The State Department supported agricultural development assistance to Ethiopia as essential for American prestige and influence in Africa, while also pointing to the prospect of increasing trade between the United States and Ethiopia. Such optimism formed part of official methods of sustaining public interest in the Point Four program in Ethiopia. Affirmation of Ethiopia's potential as a granary of the Middle East also justified American preference for agricultural development as the main goal of

¹⁹ Ibid. See also George Merrell, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, No. 117, 16 November 1950, "Grains in Ethiopia," USNA, RG 59 (1950-1954), 875.231/11-1650, Box 5387.

²⁰ R.G. Gatewood, Chargé d'Affaires *ad interim* at the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, No. 580, 10 February 1953. USNA, RG 84, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Addis Ababa Embassy, General and Classified Records, 1943-1955, Box 4.

its relations with Ethiopia. As we saw in chapter one, Ethiopian officials promoted the idea of Ethiopia as a rich and fertile nation to direct attention to Ethiopia's military security rather than its food supply.

Participation in the promotion of Ethiopia by some American officials did not prevent them from acknowledging that very little could be achieved in agricultural development if the majority of Ethiopia's farming population remained illiterate and unskilled. With these problems in mind, the United States and Ethiopia signed a supplemental agreement on 15 May 1952 to jointly fund an Imperial College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts (hereafter called Alemaya College) to produce a new generation of Ethiopian farmers who would champion the modernization of agriculture in the Ethiopian empire.

Perhaps because of the image of Ethiopia's agriculture which the Imperial Government encouraged, officials of the American Embassy initially viewed climatic conditions as a "minor" constraint on Ethiopian agriculture.²¹ Embassy officials concluded that poor seed-bed preparation, poor soil structure, pest infestations and soil erosion posed the greatest impediments to food supply in Ethiopia. This view led them to recommend the establishment of demonstration farms which exhibited "modern" methods of ground preparation and

²¹ J. Rives Childs, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia to Secretary of State, 30 April 1952, No. 438, "Annual Grains Report," USNA, RG 59 (1950-1954) DF, 875.231/4-3052, Box 5387.

harvesting to the Foreign Operations Administration (FOA), which controlled Point Four programs in Washington.²²

By September 1953, a clearer picture of the challenges of transforming peasant agriculture in Ethiopia had emerged. U.S. officials realized that climatic conditions, especially drought, the low water holding capacity of much of Ethiopia's soil and outbreaks of livestock diseases posed additional problems.²³ Against this background, the success of Point Four came to depend on major investments in soil and water conservation technology as well as funding for research on controlling pests, crop and livestock diseases.

Seeking Consensus on Approaches to Point Four in Ethiopia

Amidst their growing awareness of previously unsuspected problems in Ethiopia, State Department and Foreign Operations Administration (FOA) officials in Washington, who directed all Point Four programs, advocated an American-propelled, rapid transformation of the Ethiopian agricultural economy. But officials of the U.S. Operations Mission to Ethiopia (USOM-E), the Point Four agency in Addis Ababa, urged that the American agricultural development program be conducted gradually and in step with existing Ethiopian institutions. The American

²² Ibid.

²³ Marcus J. Gordon, Director of the United States Operations Mission to Ethiopia (USOM-E), Addis Ababa, to Foreign Operations Administration, Washington, D.C., No. 8175, 23 September 1953, USNA, RG 166, FASNR, Box 141.

Embassy in Addis Ababa shared the opinions of Point Four officials in Ethiopia about the need for moderation and showed deep concern about raising the hackles of Ethiopian officials. In a despatch to the State Department in 1951, Ambassador Rives Childs warned that "speed should be sacrificed for thorough comprehension" of the challenges of transforming Ethiopia's agricultural economy. He advised that:

a small program consistent with Ethiopian desires and needs will accrue more goodwill to the United States, as well as more benefit to the Ethiopian people than a larger but less effective program...."²⁴

Ambassador Childs also had serious doubts about the capacity of the Ethiopian civil service to successfully implement the Point Four programme. He cautioned the State Department soon after signing the Point Four agreement in June 1951 that "the organization of the Ethiopian government for the implementation of Point Four. . .[was] faulty and should be improved before any projects are undertaken."²⁵

Marcus Gordon, who directed the American Point Four programme in Ethiopia, wanted to restrict American involvement in the organization of Ethiopia's government to technical advice and to leave control over U.S. agricultural projects to

²⁴ Rives Childs, Ambassador to Ethiopia, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, No. 327, 19 February 1952, "Point Four: Implementation of Projects in Ethiopia and Principles Appertaining Thereto Which Embassy Believes to Be of Fundamental Importance," USNA, RG 166 (1950-1954), Ethiopia: International Agreements, Box 12, 875.00 TA/2-1952.

²⁵ Ibid.

the Ministry of Agriculture. He viewed American development efforts as unlikely to succeed:

unless from the very time it...[got] underway it...
[was] preparing for the day when the Ethiopian
government...[could] completely take it over and do
without foreign assistance....²⁶

The Embassy's views about the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture accentuated the differences between American policymakers over how to implement the Point Four programme in Ethiopia. Ambassador George Merrel, in 1950, and Rives Childs, in 1951, had underlined the obstacles which U.S. aid policy would face under the leadership and advice of the Ministry of Agriculture.²⁷ The Minister of Agriculture in the early 1950s, Blatta Ephrem Tewelde Medhin, had been appointed by the Emperor, according to an Embassy despatch, in response to complaints which the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) representative, Carroll Deyoe, an American, lodged against Makonnen Habte-Wold, the previous Minister of Commerce and Agriculture. Makonnen Habte-Wold was "frequently ill," had "little experience in agriculture" and proved to be "uncooperative and unwilling to listen to suggestions for change."²⁸

²⁶ Marcus J. Gordon, U.S. Director of Technical Cooperation in Ethiopia, to H.E. Blatta Ephrem Tewelde Medhin, Minister of Agriculture, n.d., USNA, RG 84 (1950-1955), Box 8.

²⁷ George R. Merrel, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, No. 86, 19 April 1950, "Recent Developments in the Agricultural Field in Ethiopia," 875.20/4-1950, USNA, RG 166, FASNR, Box 141.

²⁸ Ibid.

His successor, Blatta Ephrem, "by birth and sympathy Eritrean," and formerly Ethiopian Ambassador to London, was so "preoccupied with... [the] settlement of the Eritrean question" that he devoted little time and interest to his Ministry.²⁹ The Vice-Minister of Agriculture, *Balambaras Mahteme Sellassie*, was suspect at the Embassy because of his opposition to land reform. *Balambaras Mahteme* owned many acres of land devoted to grain cultivation. Furthermore, the Embassy held the view that *Balambaras Mahteme* "relied too much upon the advice of George Terchininov, a Russian who had lived in Ethiopia for many years and served as an Administrative Assistant in the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture."³⁰ Terchininov's "anti-American and anti-Western" stance dampened the enthusiasm of the Embassy for placing American agricultural programmes under the Ministry of Agriculture, as Marcus Gordon, the Director of Point Four in Addis Ababa, would have liked.

Dessalegn Rahmato has argued that the United States strongly influenced the agricultural policies of the Imperial Ethiopian Government.³¹ According to him, American officials who advised Ethiopia in the 1950s and early 1960s were "close-minded" in their development strategies and ill-served

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See Dessalegn Rahmato, "Peasant Agriculture Under the Old Regime," in Shiferaw Bekele, An Economic History of Ethiopia, Volume 1, p.147.

Ethiopia in the process. In the view of Dessalegn, American advisors made large-scale mechanized commercial farming the key to agricultural development and undervalued the importance of peasant agriculture in Ethiopia until the late 1960s.³²

Certainly, U.S. agricultural development proposals for many countries in the 1950s emphasized large-scale factory-type agricultural production. But in Ethiopia, the United States understood that it faced a number of economic, social and political constraints. American officials in Addis Ababa and Washington knew that large-scale mechanized agriculture in Ethiopia was impossible without a comprehensive land reform programme. They were aware that land had cultural significance in Ethiopia and was intricately woven into the tapestries of Ethiopian politics. Moreover, American officials in Addis Ababa and Washington frequently debated among themselves whether it was appropriate to put pressure on a pro-American, independent African state to redistribute its land.

The United States did not want to push so hard for land reform and agricultural development that it might produce a backlash in the Emperor's court. In fact, appearing imperialist was antithetical to the U.S. policy of ensuring stability in Imperial Ethiopia. The United States strongly supported large-scale commercial agricultural projects in Ethiopia only when concern about famine, Addis Ababa's food supply, and Ethiopia's international image in the late 1960s

³² Ibid., p.147.

led the Imperial Government to welcome a limited implementation of the Green Revolution. After 1967, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) assisted with the implementation of the comprehensive and minimum package programs which emphasized the importance of progressive peasants equipped with hybrid seeds and artificial fertilizers.

In the 1950s, American policymakers agreed that only a sizeable corp of educated Ethiopian farmers could initiate the transformation of established peasant attitudes and food production methods. Agricultural research and studies on experimental farms carried out by American-trained Ethiopian specialists appealed to American policymakers as conservative means of initiating a gradual transition from subsistence agriculture to a commercial mode of food production. Demonstration farms provided the United States with a practical means of exhibiting the value of improved seeds, modern tools and land preparation as well as encouraging the creation of a market-oriented agricultural economy. Point Four officials in Ethiopia, such as Marcus Gordon, who advocated a cautious approach, also believed that the agricultural practices of Ethiopian peasants had a rational basis in centuries of their mastery of the climate, topography and soil types. Traditional Ethiopian technology needed to be enhanced

rather than obliterated, in his view.³³

As we are already aware, the Imperial Ethiopian Government pursued commercial agriculture at a gradual pace for its own strategic reasons. U.S. endorsement of a gradual pace of agricultural transformation in Ethiopia recognized that and reflected the sensitivity which American policymakers felt towards Ethiopian "cultural mores."³⁴ The decision to work within Ethiopia's institutions and to modernize within tradition also had a practical basis. Major transformations of Ethiopian agriculture could prove to be financially burdensome for the United States.³⁵

Point Four in Ethiopia

The principal Point Four project in Ethiopia was agricultural education patterned after the American land grant colleges. The 15 May 1952 supplemental agreement to the technical cooperation pact of 16 June 1951 authorized the United States to provide a substantial portion of the teaching staff and research equipment for the proposed Imperial Ethiopian College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts. The

³³ Marcus J. Gordon, to Foreign Operations Administration, 1 September 1953, "Twelfth Program Summary of the Technical Cooperation Service for Ethiopia," 1 July -31 August 1953," USNA, RG 166, FASNR, Box 141.

³⁴ Marcus J. Gordon, to Secretary of State, No. 343, 13 February 1953, "Action Taken in Ethiopia to Implement the Recommendations of the NEADS Rome Conference," RG 166, FASNR, Box 141 A.

³⁵ Ibid.

College aimed at developing and directing a national program of agricultural extension, research and teaching. It had a long-term objective of producing that corp of trained farmers perceived by American officials to become the future agrarian lobby to pressure the Imperial Government to create the climate for market-oriented food production. The project, which was jointly funded by the United States and Ethiopia, also responded to the prevalent American view that the establishment of the basic agricultural infrastructure would attract external investment in food production in Ethiopia. The Truman Administration gave the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical Arts College the responsibility of developing the curriculum for resident teaching, research and extension services at the agricultural college in Ethiopia.

Despite the fact that the United States provided the largest amount of economic assistance to Ethiopia in the 1950s, the Imperial Government sought and accepted agricultural aid from many countries and international agencies. They included Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, the Federal Republic of Germany, the USSR, Japan and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). Countries and agencies offering economic aid and technical advice competed for recognition and leadership in developing programs related to agriculture. To compete with rival projects, U.S. officials stretched their thin resources over a wide range of projects throughout Ethiopia.

By the end of 1954, several U.S.-Ethiopian projects laying the foundation of a market-oriented agriculture had been initiated. They included the Imperial Ethiopian College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts, an Agricultural Technical School, the Agricultural Improvement Center, the Agricultural Machinery Pool, and programs in Plant Protection and Pest Control, Cooperative Coffee Development and Animal Disease Control. Point Four also provided funds for a water resources survey project, road building, and food storage programs. A pest control agreement signed in 1952 between Ethiopia and the United States put responsibility for pest control in Ethiopia under the U.S. Department of Agriculture.³⁶ The Agricultural Improvement Center established at Kobo-Alamata, in Wollo, assembled hand tools, hand-powered threshers, wooden harrows and equipment for seed bed preparation. In Fiscal Year 1957, the United States established new agricultural improvement centres at Arba Minch, in Gamu Gofa province, to disseminate improved agricultural methods. Initial programs for livestock development took the form of a joint project for sheep and cattle-breeding as well as the control of rinderpest. The objectives of the livestock project included the development of Ethiopia's enormous livestock resources for export to

³⁶ See Technical Cooperation Administration, "Country Program for FY 1954," USNA, RG 469 (1948-1961), Ethiopia, Box 2, and also Edward Korry, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to AID, Washington, D.C., A-564, 20 January 1964, "End of Tour Report, Donald L. Davis, Pilot, Regional Insect Control Project," USNA, RG 166, FASNR (1961-1966), Box 93.

European and Middle Eastern markets.

U.S.-assisted food storage and road building programmes were expected to enhance the preservation and movement of food from surplus areas into deficient regions. The Ethiopian Grain Corporation and the Columbia Steel and Tank Company of Kansas City, Missouri concluded agreements to build a 1,800 ton grain storage silo in Addis Ababa and initiated further plans to construct more silos in other towns. In January 1951, the Imperial Ethiopian Government established the Imperial Highway Authority (IHA). In February 1951, the U.S. Bureau of Roads and Highways agreed with the IEG to provide technicians for a national road development program in Ethiopia.³⁷

U.S. Agricultural Policy and Ethiopian Politics

The revelation of an unpublicized American agricultural development plan for Eritrea nearly wrecked the U.S. Point Four programme in Ethiopia. Until the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia in September 1952, Eritrea remained under temporary U.N. trusteeship. Britain served as the sole trustee for Eritrea on behalf of the United Nations. On 15 June 1951, the United States signed an agreement with the British Government in London for a "cooperative program" to develop Eritrea's agricultural economy. The Eritrean-American Technical Assistance Service (EATAS) was intended to train

³⁷ John L. Humbard served as the first American director of the Imperial Highway Authority.

Eritreans at the forestry and agricultural school at Cyprus in general farming, sisal production, dairy and poultry farming. That formed part of a long-term U.S. objective of encouraging commercial agriculture in Eritrea. A U.N. Commissioner who had been informed about the Point Four programme for Eritrea, during a visit to the State Department, spilled news of the plan in a speech in Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea. The Eritrean program still carried a confidential classification, a fact which the U.N. Commissioner did not know.³⁸

Emperor Haile Sellassie was dismayed that the Truman Administration would undertake such a plan without his knowledge. Ethiopia's interest in matters relating to Eritrea had historical roots. In the postwar period, security concerns strengthened this interest. Ethiopia ensured that Eritrea, situated along the Red Sea coast, would not become a corridor for future attacks on its empire.³⁹ Eritrean scholar Bereket Habte Sellassie has argued that U.S. support for the U.N. Resolution of 11 September 1952, which federated Eritrea with Ethiopia, arose from the American desire for Ethiopia to have

³⁸ See Eritrean-American Technical Service, "A Cooperative Program for the Augmentation of the Eritrean Agricultural Economy and for the Increase and Improvement of Certain Eritrean Educational Facilities," USNA, RG 84, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Addis Ababa Embassy (1943-1955), Box 2.

³⁹ See Basil Davidson, Lionel Cliffe and Bereket Habte Sellassie, Behind the War in Eritrea (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1980), p. 34, and "The Ethiopian Nine Point Peace of 18 May 1976," in James Firebrace with Stuart Holland, Never Kneel Down: Drought, Development and Liberation (Trenton, New Jersey: The Red Sea Press, 1986), pp. 167-168.

access to the sea.⁴⁰ It appears that the threat which the revelation of the confidential EATAS program posed to the implementation of Truman's Point Four program in Ethiopia played a significant role. Haile Sellassie's concerns made a separate Point Four programme for Eritrea very difficult to introduce. American support for the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia kept alive the initiation of the American Point Four programme in Ethiopia.

The resolution of the Eritrean question did not completely eliminate the differences between the United States and Ethiopia over the meaning of Point Four. Washington expected the agricultural college to provide part of the infrastructural base for a future take-off in agriculture. But the entire Point Four program got off to a false start over the location of the agricultural college. U.S. Point Four officials preferred a site at Jimma, but had to abandon it for political reasons. Emperor Haile Sellassie opposed the location of a prestige project in a traditionally dissident area.⁴¹ The Truman Administration assigned a committee of staff members from the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College

⁴⁰ See Bereket Habte Sellassie, "From British Rule to Federation and Annexation," in Basil Davidson, Lionel Cliffe and Bereket Habte Sellassie, Behind the War in Eritrea (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1980), p. 39.

⁴¹ For the debates over the selection of a suitable site for the agricultural college, see J. Rives Childs, Ambassador, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, No 28, 26 July 1951, "Visit of Point Four Administrator and Suggestions for Project Agreement for Agricultural School," USNA, RG 166, Box 141, 875.00-TA/7-2651.

the task of choosing a site for the College. No Ethiopian official was on the search committee. The team proposed that the agricultural college be located at a place easily accessible to the Ministry of Agriculture and its related agencies. It suggested a location "not more than 80 km distance from Addis Ababa."⁴²

The Oklahoma committee recommended Debre-Zeit (50 km southeast of Addis Ababa) as the best location for the Imperial College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts. The Emperor rejected the recommendation and decided that the College should be located in Harar province, about 500 kilometres from Addis Ababa. He offered vast tracts of land at a site which was 6 kilometres away from the town of Alemaya and very close to Ejersagoro, the Emperor's birthplace. The American government grudgingly accepted the decision. In a Cold War context and amid the well-meaning American enthusiasm for making Ethiopia a show case of the Point Four policy, the Emperor's will prevailed, but not without dismaying some U.S. officials. The Americans made Debre-Zeit, the rejected site of the college of agriculture, on the main Addis Ababa-Harar highway, the location of a new research station, where they conducted research into food, feed, fibre crops, oil seeds and vegetables.

⁴² Addis Ababa University, "Study Reports on Proposed Alemaya University of Agriculture," Vol. 1 (January 1985): 1.

The Debre Zeit research station explored the best methods for sheep breeding and wool production. It also developed local varieties of disease-resistant wheat and teff for farmers of the central plateau, one of the largest farming areas in Ethiopia. Much of the research work at the Debre Zeit station aimed at producing improved varieties of local food, spices and vegetables, teff, barley, maize, sorghum, oats and millet.⁴³ The Americans who staffed the research station took advantage of its location in the best teff producing area of the empire to help develop the local teff into a hybrid variety which became known as "American teff."⁴⁴

Alemaya College conducted studies of poultry and tested locally-produced poultry feeds. Its Agronomy Department tested oil crops and pasture for livestock and bred cattle through artificial insemination. The College's annual farmer's field days attracted peasants to exhibitions of the benefits of the application of science to plant and animal husbandry. However, Alemaya's methods were useful for only those who had the money and the land to use them.⁴⁵ Many farmers appreciated the

⁴³ Lloyd M. Adcock, Agricultural Attache, U.S. Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., AGR. 18, 18 July 1963, "Agricultural Research in Ethiopia," USNA, RG 166 (1962-1965), Box 93, Entry 5.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Lloyd M. Adcock, Agricultural Attache, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of Agriculture, AGR.-14, 1 November 1962, "Voluntary Farmer's Field Day- Oklahoma State University Contract," USNA, RG 166, FASNR (1962-1965), Ethiopia-Eritrea, Agriculture-Foreign Trade, Box 92.

scientific solutions to the problems of food production, but only a few could invest even in the cheapest form of farm equipment. Their low degree of capital formation made it difficult for subsistence peasants to afford the basic tools for pest control. The inability of poor peasants to purchase insecticides to arrest the pest menace constituted a major drawback to American plant protection programs.⁴⁶

Some peasants benefited immensely from the Point Four agricultural program. Older subsistence peasants at Alemaya remembered the names of the American teachers at Alemaya college who helped them to improve their farming and living conditions. Yusuf Abdi (over 60 years old) admitted that before the establishment of Alemaya College, he grew only two varieties of maize. The Americans at Alemaya introduced improved varieties of barley, wheat, corn and sorghum to the peasant economy in Alemaya and neighbouring villages. According to Yusuf Abdi, peasants who lived closer to Alemaya College grew and sold enough food to overcome famine. Abu-Bakr Adam (over 55 years) was "unhappy when the Americans left" because "Dr. Mosley" helped him and other peasants at Alemaya town to maintain an impressive level of prosperity in poultry farming.

⁴⁶ Author's tape interviews with older peasants (over 70 years) at Mertuley Maryam, East Gojjam, 5 October 1995 and with older peasants (over 55 years) at Kutaber, North Wollo Administrative Zone, 19 October 1995.

Abu-Bakr exported eggs to Djibouti until the local peasant association nationalized his poultry farm, sold all the chickens to the Alemaya college cafeteria and used his large poultry house as a grain store during the revolution in 1975. He recalled that a Dr. Mosley and Dr. Welsh were "always on the farm with farmers," helping with farm activities and offering technical advice on plant and animal breeding. In the view of many Alemaya peasants, Alemaya had escaped lethal famines which occur in northeastern Ethiopia "because of the Americans."⁴⁷ However, peasants who live outside Alemaya received little or no assistance from extension workers and Alemaya-trained graduates.⁴⁸

As we noted in chapter one, students who went to Alemaya were not selected on the basis of their desire or willingness to become farmers, to enter agriculture as a profession or assist in its growth. The Imperial Government supported agricultural education as part of its endeavour to modernize

⁴⁷ Author's verification of peasant testimonies at the library of Alemaya University (formerly Alemaya College) revealed that Yack C. Moseley, Agricultural Engineering Technician, and Milton E. Wells, Animal Scientist, taught at Alemaya College. They are listed as members of the faculty in the 1963-64 academic year. See Imperial Ethiopian College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts Bulletin, Academic Year 1963-64, Ministry of Agriculture Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa and also author's interviews with Yusuf Abdi and Abu-Bakr Adam, Alemaya, Ethiopia, 21 October 1995.

⁴⁸ Author's tape interviews with older peasants (over 70 years) at Mertuley Maryam, East Gojjam, 5 October 1995 and with older peasants (over 55 years) at Kutaber, North Wollo Administrative Zone, 19 October 1995.

the Imperial bureaucracy. Consequently, the bonanza of modern agricultural knowledge and skills were dissipated in the Imperial civil service and the limitation of the extension services of the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture to progressive farmers robbed poor peasants of the real benefits of American-assisted agricultural modernization efforts.

The divergence of U.S. agricultural aid objectives and those of Ethiopia arose from the different importance which they attached to agricultural development in nation building. U.S. policy prioritized economic prosperity through large-scale market-oriented agriculture as the basis for security and stability in an agrarian society. Domestic Ethiopian policy emphasized security through military readiness, as the precondition for economic prosperity. The Emperor's interest in industrialization as the motor of development contrasted with the official American view that where peasants constituted the majority of the population, industrialization was impossible without agricultural development.⁴⁹

As a result of their divergent interests, cooperation between American and Ethiopian officials on agricultural matters came to depend on a conjuncture of factors. As we have already noted in chapter one, the Imperial Government supported American suggestions when cooperation with Point Four activities guaranteed Ethiopian access to American

⁴⁹ See Technical Cooperation Administration, "Country Report: Ethiopia FY 1954," USNA, RG 469 (1951-1954), Box 2.

military hardware or strengthened Imperial power. When support for Point Four brought little military rewards, but instead stimulated suggestion for the restructuring of the Imperial civil service and generated calls for the reform of the structure of land ownership in Ethiopia, American agricultural aid lost its appeal and became a threat.

Redefining Point Four in Ethiopia: The Eisenhower Period, -1953-1961

Policy and personality differences so characteristic of American politics affected the American Point Four program in Imperial Ethiopia. The Eisenhower Administration recruited few ardent supporters of aid as a framework of diplomacy. While the new administration committed itself to the broader objectives of Point Four (helping underdeveloped countries to achieve the economic prosperity adequate for political stability), it radically reformed the strategies for accomplishing those objectives. President Eisenhower's State of the Union address in February 1953 embodied a new Point Four idea. The fourth point of his six principles for a new foreign policy restricted the scope of the fourth point in Truman's four-fold program for world peace articulated in 1949. The President argued that:

no single country, even one so powerful as [the United States], can alone defend the liberty of all nations threatened by communist aggression...Mutual security means effective mutual cooperation. For the United States, this means that, as a matter of common sense and national interest, we shall give

help to other nations in the measure that they strive earnestly to do their full share of the common task. No [amount] of aid can compensate for poverty of spirit....⁵⁰

The Eisenhower Administration took bold steps to reform American agricultural aid in Ethiopia. Congress supplanted Point Four as a framework for U.S. relations with Ethiopia when it passed the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act on 29 June 1954.⁵¹ Popularly known as Public Law 480 or PL 480, the law empowered the President to use American "surplus agricultural commodities" to "improve the foreign relations of the United States" and to expand trade in those commodities.⁵² PL 480 cut back American assistance for the production abroad of food commodities that the United States produced in abundance.⁵³

To create an atmosphere conducive for trade, the Eisenhower Administration abandoned the Point Four program's sympathy for stabilizing the Emperor's regime.⁵⁴ Its solutions

⁵⁰ See "The State of the Union Message of President Eisenhower, to the 83rd Congress," 2 February 1953, DSB, Vol. 28, No. 711 (9 February 1953): 208.

⁵¹ Congress, House, Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954, 83rd Congress, 2nd Session, 29 June 1954.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Herman Klein, Director of USOM/E, "Briefing for Mr. Clarence B. Randall," 25 March 1958, USNA, RG 273, Official Meeting Files 365th Meeting Tab D. to Clarence Randall, 25 March 1958.

⁵⁴ Oliver L. Troxel Jr, Economic Officer, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, "Briefing for Mr. Clarence B. Randall on

to the agricultural problems of Ethiopia encompassed key issues such as the reform of land tenure, changes in the machinery of government, and modifications of the existing attitudes and customs associated with agriculture.⁵⁵

The Food for Peace program, which the President announced on 29 January 1959, drove the new U.S. approach to preventing hunger in Ethiopia. By offering surplus American food to relieve hunger in Ethiopia as well as for sale to generate Ethiopian funds to finance joint development programs, the Eisenhower Administration introduced a new strategy of using American food rather than American funds to stimulate agricultural development in Ethiopia. Excess food stocks in the United States between 1952 and 1955 partly inspired the new policy. In 1955, the United States possessed large stockpiles of wheat, cotton, rice and tobacco which agricultural officials estimated "would require five years or more to liquidate."⁵⁶ The ideological message of the use of

United States Foreign Economic Policy in Africa," 25 March 1958. USNA, RG 273, Official Meeting Files, 365th Meeting, Tab E. Oliver Troxel was a Colorado career diplomat, trained as an economist, with a well-grounded knowledge of Africa. In 1965, he was put in charge of research on Africa in the Department of State. The author owes this biographical data to Edward M. Korry, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia from 1963 to 1966.

⁵⁵ Address by Secretary Foster Dulles to the Nation Over Radio and Television, "A Survey of Foreign Policy Problems," DSB, Vol. 28, No. 711 (9 February 1953): 212.

⁵⁶ Interagency Committee on Agricultural Surplus Disposal, Staff Document, "Prospects of Foreign Disposal of Domestic Agricultural Surpluses," DSB, Vol. 34, No. 886 (18 June 1956): 1019.

American food to improve health and nutrition in underdeveloped countries was best articulated by the American Ambassador to Colombia, John M. Cabot. In his view:

if the Cold War were a struggle between two ways of life, the best demonstration the United States could give of its way of life was to show that free men eat better than those under totalitarian regimes.⁵⁷

The application of Eisenhower's enlightened self-interest policy to Ethiopia partly stemmed from the frustrations which the Truman administration faced in inducing the Ethiopian government to beat its arms into ploughshares.

By the time Congress passed the PL 480, Embassy officials who supported American agricultural aid to Ethiopia had grown weary of the Imperial Government's aversion to both criticism and reform. The optimistic views of some American officials about Ethiopia turned into admonition in 1954. Ambassador Joseph Simonson's initial propensity to exaggerate the potential of Point Four to make Ethiopia the granary of the Middle East gave way to acute pessimism. In his private letter to one Mr. Westmore Wilcox of the Chase Manhattan Bank, Ambassador Simonson decried the "difficulty of doing business in Ethiopia" because of the "innate suspiciousness" of

⁵⁷ John M. Cabot, "Wise Distribution of U.S. Food Surpluses in Latin America," Remarks Made Before the Market Development Conference of the Foreign Agricultural Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bogota, Colombia, 1 April 1959, DSB, Vol. 60, No. 1036 (4 May 1959): 636.

Ethiopian officials.⁵⁸

The lack of enthusiasm of the Eisenhower Administration partly arose from the American view that the Imperial Government's reactionary values caused it to assign more importance to national security and the economic prosperity of retainers of the Imperial state than the improvement of the conditions of peasants. The view of the Minister of Agriculture, Akalework Habte-Wolde, that Ethiopia should vigilantly exercise its sovereign rights over the pace of the reform of its institutions bolstered the attitude of the Eisenhower Administration that the United States could accomplish very little in Ethiopia.⁵⁹ Moreover, the proliferation of diverse and uncoordinated bilateral and multilateral development projects created the worst form of competition, overlap and duplication, and reduced the effectiveness of American economic assistance.⁶⁰ This situation provided the justification for USOM-E, the Point Four agency in Ethiopia, to close down dormant American agricultural

⁵⁸ Joseph Simonson, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia to Westmore Wilcox, Chase Manhattan Bank, 12 October 1955, USNA, RG 84 (1950-1955), Box 9. See also Joseph J. Wagner, *Chargé d'Affaires ad. interim*, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, Confidential Despatch No. 399, 29 June 1959, "Economic Assessment-1959," USNA, RG 59 (1955-1959), DF, Box 4879.

⁵⁹ National Security Council, "U.S. Policy Toward the Horn of Africa," USNA, RG 273, NSC 5903.

⁶⁰ Herman Kleine, Director of the U.S. Operation Mission to Ethiopia (USOM-E), "Briefing for Mr. Clarence B. Randall on United States Foreign Economic Policy in Africa," USNA, RG 273, Official Meeting Files, 365th Meeting, p.4.

development projects.⁶¹ By October 1958, the most noticeable American development assistance programs in Ethiopia were the malaria eradication programs, surveys of the Blue Nile river and the construction of a military technical training center. Malaria eradication had relevance for agriculture in Ethiopia. An Embassy briefing suggested that large stretches of land in areas favourable to the production of food crops were neglected because of the high incidence of malaria in those regions.⁶²

The chief contested issue in the Eisenhower period was the significance of politically-motivated aid as opposed to assistance for economic development. In November 1956, the National Security Council, which supported Point Four as a form of compensation for the Kagnew station, favoured public funding for only sound economic projects which increased Ethiopia's ability to finance its own development. This meant assistance for the production of exportable crops which generated foreign exchange and attracted private American investment in Ethiopia. The new focus on trade instead of aid, and reform rather than upholding tradition and stabilizing the Emperor's regime, highlighted the changing mood of foreign policy discussions in Washington about Ethiopia. The new mood

⁶¹ Oliver L. Troxel Jr., First Secretary of Embassy, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, NO. 42, 31 July 1958, "Economic Survey, Ethiopia, April-June, 1958," USNA, RG 59 (1955-1959), DF, Box 4879.

⁶² Ibid.

defied the moderate advice of Ambassador Don Bliss in 1958 that existing development programs proceed uninterrupted as the best defence against local communists. Don Bliss's view that "failure . . . [of U.S. aid policies] to produce results within a reasonable time would be taken in Ethiopia and elsewhere in Africa as evidence of. . . [American] inadequacy" echoed the view of the State Department that aid should be maintained to enhance American prestige.⁶³ Neither the Ambassador's nor the State Department's view led to increased U.S. aid.

Keeping Soviet influence in Africa at bay by providing limited economic and military assistance continued to shape policy in the Eisenhower period. However, the new administration showed more tenacity than Truman's in preventing Ethiopia from exploiting American fears of Soviet Communism as a natural resource. This became more apparent after the Emperor's visit to Moscow, in 1959, where he accepted a Soviet development loan. Nonetheless, by 1958 U.S. policymakers had developed the view that communism threatened the imperial regime and the canons of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as much as it threatened U.S. security interests in

⁶³ Don C. Bliss, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, "Briefing for Mr. Clarence B. Randall on United States Foreign Economic Policy in Africa," 25 March 1958, USNA, RG 273, Official Meeting Files 365th Meeting Tab D.

Ethiopia.⁶⁴

The U.S. Embassy in the Eisenhower period was more concerned with the revolutionary ideas held by a portion of Ethiopia's educated elite than the growth of Soviet influence.⁶⁵ In 1955, Ambassador Joseph Simonson drew attention to "the strong desire for progress and change" among the educated class and the possibility that it would attempt to accomplish "by revolution what evolution was unable to bring about."⁶⁶ Ambassador Simonson had cautioned the Eisenhower Administration that "the anachronistic state of Ethiopian society with its inequality in the distribution of wealth" made Ethiopia a fertile field for revolution or "communist subversion." In hindsight, Reverend Ambassador Joseph Simonson could not have been more prophetic in his vision of imminent change in Haile Sellassie's Ethiopia. His despatch of 21 April 1955 to the State Department predicted that the Emperor's government would definitely fall in "twenty years...and a whole new group of self-made men may occupy the positions of power."⁶⁷ He cautioned that in the absence of a strong Emperor,

⁶⁴ National Security Council, "U.S. Policy Toward the Horn of Africa," 4 November 1959, USNA, RG 273, Policy Paper Files NSC 5903.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Joseph Simonson, Ambassador, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, No. 290, April 21, 1955, "Comments On A New Generation of Ethiopians," USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), 875.41/4-2155, Box 4881.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

a government under the new generation of educated Ethiopians, "would be. . . difficult to work with" because of their strong nationalist feelings.⁶⁸

The Point Four policies of the Truman Administration indirectly helped to create a revolutionary atmosphere in Ethiopia. By 1958, Point Four aid had produced a number of trained civil servants, but the lax attitude of the Imperial Government to land reform and its strategically-driven development strategies had hampered the use of the available trained personnel for serious agricultural development. Those who could not gain access to the modernized civil service and the military reacted to unemployment and social frustration by turning to revolutionary activism.

Liberal American Peace Corps volunteers helped to sustain the revolutionary attitude of students and the urban unemployed who opposed the Imperial regime. But the revolutionary rhetoric of Ethiopian students in the 1960s contained a witch's brew of pro-American feelings, which acknowledged the support of the Peace Corps volunteers for student rebellion, and anti-American sentiments, which made "the expulsion of...[the] American Peace Corps teachers" a key political goal of Ethiopian students.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ See The Ethiopian Students Union of North America (ESUNA), "Repression in Ethiopia," Reprint 5, (Cambridge, Mass.: Africa Research Group, January 1971), pp.8, 11.

Anxiety about that brand of the nationalism of the new generation of educated Ethiopians partly influenced the course of U.S. aid policy after Truman. The U.S. call for a clear policy of succession in Ethiopia arose from fears that "the death of the Emperor, or his incapacitation" would "precipitate a struggle for power at the center, possibly complicated by secession movements in Eritrea and in outlying provinces of the empire."⁷⁰ The attempted overthrow of the Imperial Government in December 1960 by the Imperial Bodyguard, inspired by a few educated Ethiopians, confirmed American anxieties about the imminence of political change.⁷¹ It gave more credence to the critique of American development programmes in Ethiopia by the Eisenhower Administration. In the aftermath of the coup, the State Department conducted relations with Ethiopia with one eye on preparations for the future. It advised American citizens in Addis Ababa to carry out their responsibilities in anticipation of political change. What seemed uncertain to the State Department were the "timing and . . . the manner. . . [of] the change." The State Department preferred that the "change be an evolutionary

⁷⁰ National Security Council, "U.S. Policy Toward Ethiopia," USNA, RG 273, Policy Paper File NSC 5615/1, 19 November 1956.

⁷¹ See National Security Council, "U.S. Policy On the Horn of Africa," Secret NSC. 6028, USNA, RG 273, Policy Paper Files NSC 6028, 30 December 1960.

one."⁷²

The United States, Evolutionary Change and Land Reform

The U.S. government recognized that a transition to modern agriculture in Ethiopia required more than changes in production methods and the training of a corps of educated farmers. Changes in the institutions associated with food production were uppermost in American discussions about the role of agriculture in the stability of peasant societies such as Ethiopia's. American suggestions for land reform went beyond determinations of the quantity of available fertile land in Ethiopia and who owned land. American advisers sought to give all peasants the opportunity to purchase land, pay fair taxes, obtain credit on favourable terms and secure a better market price for their food crops. U.S. policymakers believed that these policy changes offered greater opportunity for peasants to employ improved techniques of production.

Obviously, the Ethiopian land reform structure was antithetical to the American vision of an ideal distribution of land holdings. The founding fathers of the American Republic recognized the significance of giving land to the tiller. Thomas Jefferson acknowledged that a nation acquires the primary elements of political stability when tenants have

⁷² State Department to the American Embassy in Addis Ababa, n.d. USNA, RG 59, Records of G. Mennen Williams, Country Files (1961-1966) Country Files, Ethiopia, Box 28.

the opportunity to become farm owners.⁷³ However, none of the problems which the United States faced in its efforts to help modernize agriculture in Ethiopia proved to be more difficult than the land reform question. U.S. officials expected the Emperor and his officials to show more than a cosmetic interest in reforming the prevailing distribution of land.

Lack of a sincere commitment to land reform by the Imperial Government hindered U.S. agricultural development assistance in the Eisenhower period. Embassy officials decried the exploitation of peasants, the arbitrary evictions of tenant-peasants by affluent farmers and the "degrading peasant-landlord relationship."⁷⁴ Curiously, Americans acknowledged the intricate relationship that existed between land, status and power in Ethiopia, but never grasped that landlords and the Church obstructed land reform and land tenure in Ethiopia as strongly as the Emperor. The reluctance of Haile Sellassie to commit to serious land tenure measures was well known to officials of the American Embassy. As one Embassy despatch to Washington revealed:

⁷³ See Statement by Channing Tobias, U.S. Delegate to the U.N. General Assembly, "Importance of Land Reform," 20 December 1951, DSB, Vol. 26, No. 655 (14 January 1952): 64.

⁷⁴ Joseph J. Wagner, *Chargé d'Affaires ad. interim*, U.S. Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, No. 399, 29 June 1959; Lloyd M. Adcock to Department of Agriculture, No AGR.-41, 6 March 1964, "Ethiopia: Grains and Feeds," USNA, RG 166, FASNR, Ethiopia (Forest Products-Wool) to EEC, 1-3, Box 93, Entry 5.

the only loser from the adoption of a secure form of tenure would be the Emperor, who would no longer be able to reward or punish through the free exercise of his traditional prerogatives to grant or withdraw land.⁷⁵

The despatch suggests that "a few of the younger Church people [favoured] the development of church lands as a showcase of modern agriculture."⁷⁶ These convictions made Embassy officials sceptical about the genuineness of the much publicised Imperial land reform proclamations of 18 September 1959. They asked why a serious proclamation which entitled every Ethiopian to the ownership of land could be made without prior consultation with the Ethiopian Development Bank, the Ministries of Agriculture, Finance and the Interior each of which bore some responsibility for agricultural development in the empire. The Embassy considered the proclamation as an idea "conceived by the Emperor and a few close advisors" to get the urban unemployed out of Addis Ababa.⁷⁷

While U.S. officials in Addis Ababa agreed that an agricultural economy in which peasants lacked guarantees over the ownership of land could not make much use of modern technology, they had great difficulty in imposing a land

⁷⁵ See Joseph J. Wagner, *Chargé d'Affaires ad. interim*, U.S Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, No. 399, 29 June 1959, USNA, RG 166, FASNR, Ethiopia (Forest Products-Wool) to EEC, 1-3, Box 93, Entry 5.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ William Dale Fischer, First Secretary, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, No 98, 20 October 1959, "Economic Summary, Ethiopia--July-September 1959," USNA, RG 59, 1955-1959, Box 4879.

tenure policy on Ethiopia. The Embassy's agricultural attache, Lloyd Adcock, an agricultural economist from Oklahoma, contemplated that:

Land reform, if pushed too fast, can be violently revolutionary but will have to come before a modern agricultural industry can be initiated. Too much speed to make a touchdown in this field could mean a disaster....⁷⁸

The assumption of leadership in the land reform movement by radical students in Ethiopia made U.S. officials deeply anxious. The Eisenhower Administration's emphasis on trade rather than aid was a subtle strategy to induce an evolutionary change in Ethiopia's land tenure system. The pursuit of development through private enterprise rather than public funds required the reformation of institutions which obstructed the optimal use of private investment. By encouraging the expansion of cash crops, especially cotton and coffee, the administration was convinced that the expansion of foreign trade in Ethiopia would provide Ethiopia with the foreign exchange to finance its agricultural development. Moreover, trade in cash crops would create a situation in which "by necessity and ambition" to compete on a world market, the Imperial Government would reform land tenure relationships to take advantage of advanced technology in the production and marketing of those crops.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

The attainment of independence in the former British West African colony of the Gold Coast (Ghana), in 1957, and the emergence of more independent nations in Africa south of the Sahara in the late 1950s and early 1960s diminished the importance of Ethiopia in U.S. African policy. In fact, Ethiopia had become less useful to the United States in the U.N. General Assembly since 1958. It voted against the United States "on numerous occasions," but the new Democratic Administration under President Kennedy needed the Emperor to "exercise a moderating influence" on the emerging Pan-Africanist rhetoric on the African continent.⁸⁰

American Assistance to Ethiopia: The Kennedy-Johnson Years, 1960-69

The limited successes of American agricultural development efforts in Ethiopia increased the attractiveness of the new African nations for the Kennedy administration. The Eisenhower Administration was the first to express concern about their "nationalist and self-determinist aspirations."⁸¹ The Kennedy Administration sought to prevent them from being manipulated by the Soviet Union. Deterring virulent nationalism and securing the alignment of the new nations with

⁸⁰ See National Security Council, "U.S. Policy On the Horn of Africa," Secret NSC. 6028, USNA, RG 273, Policy Paper Files NSC 6028, 30 December 1960.

⁸¹ National Security Council, "U.S. Policy Towards Africa South of the Sahara Prior to Calendar Year 1960," 31 July 1957, USNA, RG 273, Policy Paper File NSC 5719.

the West accelerated the shifting focus of the U.S. from old Africa (Ethiopia, Libya and Liberia) to the African new frontier (Ghana, Tanzania, Nigeria and Kenya). The declining interest in Ethiopia at the beginning of 1960 could be discerned from the U.S. perception of the newly independent nations of Africa as economically more valuable. The new nations also acquired political significance in U.S. policy as the spot to re-evaluate U.S. relations with Africa and to encourage "economic development" and "democratic political evolution."⁸² The foreign policy of the Kennedy Administration also reflected a view held by the National Security Council that "in the event of war or loss of Western access to the Mediterranean," Africa South of the Sahara "could be of considerable importance" in the control of air and sea communications systems.⁸³

Beneath U.S. interest in the new nations lay the unpublicized American decision to leave the Kagnew station, which had provided "the fundamental basis of U.S. interest in Ethiopia, for the more modern base at Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, in 1963."⁸⁴ Despatches from the American Embassy after 1963 highlighted the "structural impediments" to the rapid development of agriculture in Ethiopia. They clearly

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Author's conversation with Edward M. Korry, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia from 1963 to 1966, 26 September 1997.

labeled the impediments as the administrative and technical difficulties of implementing rational development programmes in Ethiopia. All these terms were guarded ways of specifying the clearly diminishing importance of Ethiopia in U.S. foreign policy.

Ambassador Edward Korry, the first of the Kennedy government's ambassadors to Ethiopia, provided the impetus for a serious review of U.S. development assistance in Ethiopia. The old view of Ethiopia as the potential "breadbasket of Europe" began to be exchanged in the Kennedy period for a new view that "it takes more than good land to produce a full breadbasket."⁸⁵ The Embassy concluded in 1963 that politics, poverty and the poor management of technical assistance were the most serious problems affecting Ethiopian agriculture,. What Ethiopia lacked, the American Embassy's agricultural expert, Lloyd Adcock, wrote were:

literate farmers, tools, credit systems for small farmers, storage facilities, agricultural processing equipment, satisfactory transportation, organized marketing systems, and an administration that. . . made effective moves to come to grips with these complex problems.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Lloyd Adcock to Secretary of Agriculture, AGR.-34, 22 May 1963, "Ethiopia's Agricultural Policy," USNA, RG 166 (1962-1966), Eritrea-Ethiopia: Agriculture and Foreign Trade, USNA, Box 92, Entry 5.

⁸⁶ Lloyd Adcock to Secretary of Agriculture, AGR.-34, 22 May 1963, "Ethiopia's Agricultural Policy," USNA, RG 166, FASNR (1962-1965), Eritrea-Ethiopia, Agriculture-Foreign Trade, Box 92, Entry 5.

Ambassador Korry decried the ill-conceived Ethiopian requests for aid which many countries, including the United States, frequently granted to maintain good relations with the Emperor. To avoid waste, he and his staff demanded more definitive assessments of the need for assistance in Ethiopia. The lengthy and detailed procedures of American assistance that Ethiopian officials often criticized were more strictly enforced in a new process that marked the start of a more contentious relationship between Ethiopia and the United States which continued into the 1990s.

Unlike the Truman Administration, the Kennedy Administration had few advocates of modernization within tradition. With very little to lose beyond the sentimental view of Ethiopia as a beacon of hope for African-Americans, the Kennedy Administration made forthright attempts to streamline official American economic assistance to Ethiopia. Edward Korry pushed the Imperial Ethiopian Government to seriously address the "landlord-tenant relationships which stifled incentive" while his agricultural staff loudly urged Washington to compel the IEG to modify Ethiopia's "ancient traditions" in order to foster the profit motive and "the normal incentive in developed countries that drive[s] people to physical and mental exertion."⁸⁷

⁸⁷ See Lloyd M. Adcock to Secretary of State, AGR-34, 22 May 1963, "Ethiopian Agricultural Policy," and Edward M. Korry, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, A-102, 19 August 1966, "Economic Summary of January-August, 1966," USNA, RG 166, FASNR (1967), Ethiopia: Grains, Feeds-

Yet, officials of the Kennedy Administration acknowledged that only Ethiopia could make the changes that were required to transform agriculture. These changes included a reorganization of the working relationship between the ministries and institutions associated with food production and acquisition. As we have already noted, the Imperial Government refused to reform the land tenure system and reorganize the Ministry of Agriculture, although it set up a Ministry of Land Reform in 1966 and a Task Force in 1969 to study the American suggestions.

The Embassy reinforced its conviction that:

the problems facing the agricultural economy. .
.[in Ethiopia] lie in the realm of government,
traditions, laws, training, management, marketing,
and the [un]willingness of everybody to accept the
fact that agriculture is a business and must be
modernized before Ethiopia can become a modern
country.⁸⁸

Lack of coordination of the work of government ministries responsible for agricultural development, ineffective cadastral surveys of land to specify the quantity of truly fertile land in the empire and the lack of a legal basis for land tenure to eliminate interminable litigations over land and its use as a means of keeping political control

Wool, Entry 5, Box 17..

⁸⁸ Lloyd M. Adcock, Agricultural Attache, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Department of Agriculture, AGR.-22, 7 November 1963, "Ethiopia: Report On Visit to the Lake Tana Area and to the Bahr Dar Textile Mills, S.C.," USNA, RG 166 (1962-1965), ERITREA-ETHIOPIA-AGRICULTURE-FOREIGN TRADE, Box 92, Entry 5.

constituted the vices that retarded agricultural development. Embassy officials lamented that the Ministry of Agriculture set no realistic goals for agriculture and gave inadequate support to the pest control programme.⁸⁹ The Minister of Agriculture, Akalework Habte-Wolde reportedly welcomed American assistance, but insisted that the use of the aid money and the determination of agricultural goals be left to the discretion of his ministry and government.⁹⁰

In Ethiopia, the problem was not so much that the foreign advisors grabbed control of specific activities, but that Ethiopians on the project left many of the duties to foreign technical advisors. The Embassy argued that "if left to themselves, IEG personnel were content to sit in Addis Ababa doing nothing, except driving project vehicles about town on nebulous business trips."⁹¹ There were Imperial officials who recognized that Ethiopia had an agricultural problem, but they had no authority to take the initiative to identify and define the essential problems to be solved. Moreover, the Emperor gave little authority to introduce the innovative policies

⁸⁹ Lloyd M. Adcock to Secretary of Agriculture, AGR.-34, 22 May 1963, "Ethiopia's Agricultural Policy."

⁹⁰ Lloyd M. Adcock to U.S. Department of Agriculture, AGR 28, 2 April 1963, "Biographical Data on Minister of Agriculture," RG 166, FASNR, (1962-1966), Box 92.

⁹¹ (?) Vance, U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa to AID, Washington, D.C., A-892, 1-8-63, "End of Tour Report by Stanley A. Ostazeski, Plant Pathology Advisor," USNA, RG 166, FASNR, Eritrea-Ethiopia, Agriculture-Foreign Trade, Box 92, Entry 5. See also Author's tape interview with Dr. Asfaw Zelleke, Alemaya University of Agriculture, 16 November 1995.

needed to transform agriculture to his ministers and civil servants. As Embassy sources confirmed, U.S. pressure for land reform and a comprehensive national agricultural policy inspired more awe than reform.

By 1963, relatively little growth in agriculture had been achieved beyond an increase in the volume of coffee exports, an accomplishment facilitated by the extension of roads into coffee producing areas and not by the application of advanced technology or improved managerial practices.⁹² The Embassy concluded in 1963 that the only visible accomplishment of U.S. development programmes in Ethiopia had been the expansion of air transport. This was a policy success which Embassy personnel described as "a costly way of moving food and unfortunately too expensive a means of transport for most Ethiopians."⁹³ Many of the agricultural research stations established throughout the country had been idle due to the inability of the Imperial Government to provide funds to pay the trained staff. These situations solidified the view in 1963 that American agricultural development projects in Ethiopia needed to be related to an "integrated objective."⁹⁴

⁹² Lloyd Adcock, to Department of Agriculture, AGR-29, 17 April 1963, "Ethiopia: The Role of the United States in the Economic Development of Ethiopia," RG 166, FASNR (1962-1966), Box 92.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Participation in the IEG's Minimum Package Programs in the early 1970s enabled the United States to concentrate its aid on selected areas and farmers. In 1970, Washington advanced an Eth. \$ 5.2 million credit facility to commercial farmers who produced exportable crops at Shashamane, in the southeast of Addis Ababa. American aid would soon have become focussed on promising areas inhabited by progressive peasants. But the military coup of 1974 terminated work in the embryonic commercial agricultural sector and in peasant agriculture.

Conclusion

Securing subsistence for poor peasants and enlarging their material choices lay at the heart of the American Point Four development ideology which emphasized agricultural development. However, its implementation by the Imperial Government within the constraints of Ethiopia's semi-feudal agrarian economy locked subsistence peasants and the rural poor into an institutional mode that limited their choices and accelerated their impoverishment.

The United States and Ethiopia did not succeed in resolving the contradiction between the American view that national security lay in economic prosperity and the elimination of hunger and the Ethiopian conviction that nation-building depended on military security. These opposing ideologies of development, and the competing political objectives that propelled them, ensnared the partnership which

the United States tried to forge with Imperial Ethiopia to eliminate or mitigate the consequences of hunger in Ethiopia from 1950 to 1974.

American agricultural aid spoke to a vital need in Ethiopia, but it did not go far enough to address that need. Its failures can be attributed to the Imperial Government as well as the United States. Ethiopia accepted American agricultural aid in order to consolidate internal political control and present a semblance of modernity. On the other hand, the long term objective of American agricultural aid was to promote the transition from subsistence to market agriculture in Imperial Ethiopia.

The American Point Four programme represented the most serious, coordinated agricultural development programme in Ethiopia's history. Peasants showed great eagerness to use new agricultural methods and improved seeds, but the fruits of the American agricultural aid were consigned to a mythical future era in which educated farmers armed with science and technology would alter the institutional constraints on food supply to eradicate famine in Ethiopia. The emphasis of Point Four on education and mechanized agriculture made the ordinary peasant, for whom famine was a recurrent scourge, Point Four's most distant beneficiary.

The justification of the American desire to create an abundant food supply in Ethiopia to fulfill its broader goals of peace, security and trade was wise for so long as it drew

American and Ethiopian support. But the central players on the U.S. side never agreed on the scope, direction and goals of American agricultural policy in Ethiopia. Ethiopia's interest in the trappings rather than the substance of agricultural development obscured official American indecision.

The fortunes of American agricultural assistance programs in Ethiopia solidified other lessons too. They demonstrated that foreign assistance can only supplement a major effort to which the recipient country is fully committed. Ethiopia embraced American agricultural aid for its own purpose and not to make Ethiopia over or to strive to achieve the level of political freedom and material progress of the United States.

American aid for agricultural education produced results though they were different than those which American policymakers hoped to achieve. Far from creating a nation of contented commercial farmers well-disposed to the United States, American agricultural education programs produced a class of revolutionary and anti-American Ethiopians. The miseries of the peasantry struck a chord with many of them and the desire for land reform became their persistent quest. They realized that reform of agricultural policy and land tenure held the only hope of raising subsistence farming to a level capable of supplying the population with adequate food. But the new generation of educated Ethiopians lost sight of the American caution that too much haste to score a touchdown in land reform legislation and agricultural policy could create

a disaster of immense proportions. That is what happened, as we shall discuss in chapter five.

CHAPTER THREE

FAMINE AND THE DOMESTIC POLITICS OF RELIEF IN IMPERIAL ETHIOPIA, 1950-1974

How does any society allow its own members to be starved to death when some are overstuffing themselves with food?... Nothing else reveals social, economic and political anarchy more than famine.

Mesfin Wolde-Mariam

Famine, that is extreme scarcities of food, and rain-dependent agricultural economies are intimate acquaintances. Historically, famine has occurred in certain parts of Ethiopia every year.¹ Peasants, pastoralists and the rural poor sought redemption from it in prayer or through their own survival strategies.² When these strategies withstood periodic natural calamities, famine did not pose any danger to rural Ethiopians. It threatened their lives when their coping-mechanisms succumbed to dramatic natural disasters, when their obligations to state and landlord became unbearable and when the state failed to intervene in time.

¹ Richard Pankhurst, The History of Famines and Epidemics in Ethiopia Prior to the Twentieth Century (Addis Ababa: Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, 1991).

² See Dessalegn Rahmato, Famine and Survival Strategies: A Case Study from Northeast Ethiopia (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1991), p.33.

The extent to which the Imperial state acted to bolster famine survival mechanisms in rural Ethiopia or intervened to prevent mass death from starvation depended on how it conceived of famine and reconciled its domestic and international interests. This chapter examines how natural factors and state actions interacted to cause or worsen famine in Ethiopia from 1950 to 1974. It also puts in historical perspective the circumstances under which the Imperial Government intervened to relieve famine in Ethiopia.

It argues that in order to nurture a false image of Ethiopia as a productive nation able to feed itself and others, to defend its domestic agricultural policy and to justify Emperor Haile Sellassie's preference for security as the top national need, the Emperor and his officials constructed a view of the roots of famine that perpetuated it and sabotaged their ability to relieve it. Although the Imperial Government paid scant attention to famine in the mediation of its domestic and international interests, it was the recurrence of famine in Ethiopia that accelerated its downfall on 12 September 1974.

The Imperial Ideology of Famine and the Famine-Creation Process

From 1950 to 1974, Emperor Haile Sellassie and his officials portrayed Ethiopia as a rich and fertile nation.³

³ See "Haile Sellassie I's Radio Message From Guenet Leul Palace on August 28, 1959 and on September 18, 1959," Addis Ababa: Ministry of Information, 1959, pp. 24, 27 and

The glorification of Ethiopia's agricultural capacities gained credence from exports of grains to countries such as India, Italy, Great Britain, Sudan and Yemen between 1950 and 1963.

Table 1.--Ethiopian Food Exports, 1950-1963

Year	Grains Exported in Metric Tons (MT)
1950	31,994
1951	19,648
1952	50,444
1953	28,474
1954	15,732
1955	18,869
1956	3,868
1957	6,125
1958	2,202
1959	37
1960	435
1961	978
1962	3,590
1963	874

Source: Lloyd M. Adcock, Agricultural Attache, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, AGR 41, 6 March 1964, "Ethiopia: Grains and Feeds," USNA, RG 166, FASNR, Box 93, Entry 5.

However, export of grain took place against the background of intermittent hunger in rural Ethiopia. Peasants who lived on the margins of subsistence barely participated in Ethiopia's international trade in grains. The producers of

also "Speech on the Opening of Parliament, November 2, 1962," Ethiopia Observer, 8, 4 (1965): 276; "Emperor's Speech on Ethiopia's Second Five Year Plan and Envisaged Land Reform," Ethiopia Observer, 6, 4 (1963): 297; "Speech on the Opening of the Ethiopian Parliament, November 2, 1972," Ethiopia Observer, 15, 4 (1973): 198.

grain for export were influential landlords for whom peasants who were vulnerable to famine worked in exploitative sharecropping tenancies. The contrived idea of a bountiful Ethiopia partly arose from the abundant stocks of food that these landlords accumulated from tenant peasants and the reliable supply of food that Addis Ababa, the capital, enjoyed under the Imperial Government.⁴

Obviously, the portrayal of Ethiopia as "a rich and fertile nation" by the Emperor and his highest officials was politically beneficial. It enabled the government to conveniently explain famine in some rural areas of Ethiopia as a temporary natural disaster. That explanation discouraged any discourse that located the roots of Ethiopia's famines in the political, economic and social arrangements of the Ethiopian empire.⁵ The refusal to view famine as a systemic problem accentuated by state agricultural policies had diplomatic benefits. It enabled the Emperor and his officials to put agricultural development and famine issues beyond the domain of serious bilateral discussions with foreign officials. Strategically, the Imperial ideology of famine justified the Emperor's choice of military security as the state's paramount

⁴ See Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," p.347.

⁵ See Haile Sellassie I, "Coronation Day Address, November 2, 1962," Ethiopia Observer 6, 4 (1963): 299 and also Emperor's speech on "Ethiopia's Second Five Year Plan and Envisaged Land Reform," Ethiopia Observer 6, 4 (1963): 295-6.

priority and responsibility.⁶

A 1958 Ministry of Interior circular indicates how the Imperial Government perceived some famines and where it sought to consign their alleviation. This circular, which the Ministry issued in the midst of widespread food shortages, exhorted rich farmers to help the poor "by lending...[them] food...and seeds." The government promised to reward "the rich farmer's kindness" by "keeping their names on record."⁷ The contents of the circular suggest that the Imperial Government viewed the famine as the consequence of a breakdown of traditional moral obligations in rural society. A return to the principle of noblesse oblige was the solution.

The government ought to have known that by 1958 its policies had already undermined the moral economy of peasants in Ethiopia.⁸ James McCann has observed that the centralization of political authority in the hands of Emperor Haile Sellassie transformed traditional social structures, in

⁶ See U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Conversation With Dejazmatch Zewde, Minister of Public Works, Imperial Ethiopian Government," 26 April 1956, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), 875.2614/4-2656, Box 4881.

⁷ Imperial Ethiopian Government, Ministry of Interior, "Memorandum On Cooperation Between the Rich and the Poor Farmers," July 1958, Bacho District Administrative Archives, File No.-3/472-1. I am indebted to Dr. Tekalign Wolde-Mariam of the History Department at Addis Ababa University for this source material.

⁸ For a detailed analysis of the concept of "moral economy," see James Scott, The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), chapter 6.

which the bonds of reciprocity shaped the relationships between peasants and local lords, into modern administrative institutions, in which "bureaucrats related to rural producers through the market and imperial edicts."⁹ Paternalistic local aristocrats ceased to believe that they had a moral obligation to relieve peasant suffering. In the mid-twentieth century, on those rare occasions when the state intervened to redress the inability of peasants to cope with famine, officials and beneficiaries of relief assistance viewed it as an act of Imperial munificence.¹⁰

Timely and appropriate state responses to famine depended on state policies and the decisions of civil servants. Moreover, some state policies and actions by civil servants undermined the ability of peasants to employ their own capacities to survive famine. In the Imperial Government's view, famine and other dire circumstances did not mitigate the obligation of vulnerable peasants to pay taxes to the state.¹¹

⁹ See James McCann. From Poverty to Famine in Northeast Ethiopia: A Rural History 1900-1935 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), p.202.

¹⁰ Author's interview with Woizero Fitsum Abraha (34 years?) Ato Abera Berhe (70 years) in Adi-Gudom woreda, Tigray Region, 23 September 1995 and tape interview with 12 elder peasants, in Wegel Tena, Delanta woreda, North Wollo Administration Zone, 14 October 1995 on their experiences with famine and state relief assistance before 1974.

¹¹ Haile Sellassie I's Speech from the Throne, Ethiopia Observer, 12, 1 (1969): 3; Author's tape interviews with Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, former Professor of Geography at Addis Ababa University, and author of Rural Vulnerability to Famine, in Addis Ababa, 8 March 1995, and with 12 elder peasants at Kutaber keřema in Kutaber woreda, North Wollo Administrative

The failure of peasants to pay taxes for three consecutive years often led to confiscation of their land by the state. This spectre often compelled poor peasants to sell part of their property to pay taxes in order to keep the land which constituted their primary source of a livelihood.¹²

Only the Emperor had the power to absolve Ethiopians of taxes. He exercised this prerogative on the advice of his Council of Ministers. However, most of the appeals by peasants for tax relief never reached the Council of Ministers or the Emperor.¹³ Peasant petitions for tax relief often aroused the anger of district officials appointed by the Emperor to maintain law and order and to collect taxes.¹⁴ Documents in the administrative archives of Shoa Province, which Tekalign Wolde-Mariam has examined, contain frequent rebukes of lower level officials by their superiors when they declined to collect taxes during major famines.¹⁵

Region, 20 October 1995, on causes of famine in Ethiopia.

¹² Author's tape interviews with elder peasants at Mertuley Maryam, Enebse Sermeder Woreda, East Gojjam, 5 October 1995.

¹³ Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," p.286.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp.282-3.

Peasant appeals for food and tax relief reveal the complex politics of patronage that pervaded the Imperial bureaucracy.¹⁶ District officials also discouraged peasants from disclosing their dire condition to the Emperor in order to protect the income which they received from taxes. Some district officials colluded with grain merchants and local moneylenders, who benefitted from famine by lending money to the destitute and selling grain at higher prices. Tekalign Wolde-Mariam has observed that some officials seeking to prove their efficiency and loyalty to the Emperor--and to reap the fortunes that fealty brought--undertook tax collection expeditions even before the beginning of the official tax season.¹⁷ When their appeals for tax relief yielded no results, peasants sometimes resorted to violent rebellions.¹⁸ Tax burdens created such a loathsome feeling in peasants that they viewed even the government's best intentions, such as offers of free vaccinations for cattle during famine-inducing outbreaks of livestock diseases, as state strategies to identifying peasant property in order to facilitate tax

¹⁶ Gebru Tareke, Ethiopia: Power and Protest, pp. 50-51.

¹⁷ Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," p.288.

¹⁸ Addis Hiwet, Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution (London: Review of African Political Economy, 1975), pp. 100-101; Peter Schwab, Ethiopia and Haile Sellassie (New York: Facts On File Inc., 1972), p.124; Gebru Tareke, Ethiopia: Power and Protest, p. 84; Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City And Its Hinterlands," pp. 282-3.

collection.¹⁹

District officials ignored some local famines and reported on others in such imprecise language as to make impossible any clear grasp of their magnitude. Perhaps it was because of their awareness of these practices that officials of the Ministry of the Interior in Addis Ababa developed skeptical attitudes towards reports of famine from district officials. Mesfin Wolde-Mariam has observed that they often inappropriately requested clarifications or, when many deaths were reported, "a list of names of the dead."²⁰

Mesfin's argument that state officials kept the Emperor in the dark about the magnitude of famine in his empire is untenable. The evidence is clear that the Emperor was informed and discussed the situation with foreign officials. Indeed, despite his desire to keep the Americans in the dark about the extent of famine in Ethiopia, the Emperor sometimes made personal and private requests for famine-relief assistance to American presidents during his visits to the United States and asked American officials for food aid during their visits to Addis Ababa. He certainly knew the basis for his actions. As we shall note in chapter four, American ambassadors and other American officials in Addis Ababa often approached the Emperor

¹⁹ See Joseph Simonson, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, No.124, 1 November 1954, "Food and Agricultural Report," USNA, RG 166, Box 141, 875.20/11-154.

²⁰ Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, p.37.

to pledge American famine-relief assistance in their meetings. American officials who discussed famine-relief assistance with the Emperor certainly asked him about the dimensions of famine in the empire.

It was only when dire circumstances distinguished minor and localized famines from major and widespread disasters that the Emperor and his government acted to reduce suffering. As American Charge d'Affaires Joseph Wagner noted in 1959, the "cardinal rule" of the Emperor and his ministers was to take no action until the situation became critical.²¹ It is also likely that the centralization of decision-making in the Emperor's hands, and his unwillingness to admit that famine constituted Ethiopia's bubonic plague, fostered hesitation and inertia in the responses of his higher officials to reports of famine.

Historically, when the state failed to respond to desperate peasant appeals for tax relief or when it delayed famine-relief assistance, the affected emigrated in search of food or employment. The Emperor could no longer overlook reports of mass death from starvation when rural survival strategies collapsed, forcing large numbers of starving peasants and the rural poor to migrate towards Addis Ababa. The visual display of the plight of Ethiopia's rural population on the outskirts of the capital and within it

²¹ Joseph J. Wagner, Charge d'Affaires ad. interim, U.S. Embassy, Addis Ababa, No. 399, 29 June 1959, "Economic Assessment--1959", RG 59 (1955-59), 875.00/6-2959, Box 4879,.

endangered the image of a prosperous Ethiopia that the Emperor and his officials projected in Ethiopia's international relations. At such times, famine acquired political significance and compelled the state to respond.²²

Famine and the Domestic Politics of Relief, 1950-60

Peasants in Ethiopia survived minor and localized famines between 1950 and 1956 by pledging or selling portions of their land to obtain food and money. When these strategies proved inadequate, they sought tax relief from the state. In 1952, acute crop failure struck peasants in Akaki, a sub-district of Ada, in southern Shoa. The situation forced some Akaki peasants to appeal to the Emperor for tax relief. They petitioned the Emperor after officials in their district neglected their reports of poor harvests and their requests for the postponement of tax collection.²³

Unlike the minor and localized famines of the early 1950s, famine in 1958 was widespread and its effects harrowing enough to compel state intervention. It contained the ingredients of a politically significant famine. It affected Harar, the Emperor's dukedom, and some districts in Tigray.

²² Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, p.35. See also Ethiopian Red Cross Society to International League of the Red Cross Societies, 29 May 1959, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), -875.49/5-2959.

²³ Tekalign Wolde-Mariam. "A City and Its Hinterlands," pp. 307, 400-401; Dessalegn Rahmato, Famine and Survival Strategies: A Case Study from Northeast Ethiopia (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1991), p.100.

Famine also convulsed North and Central Shoa, the regions from which the capital city obtained some of its food supplies, as well as western and southern Eritrea, regions of a province then federated with Ethiopia.²⁴

Many of the areas affected by famine in 1958 had also suffered drought and locust invasions since 1950. Pre-1958 state locust control measures had been hampered by the strong opposition among peasants and pastoralists to the aerial and ground spraying of pesticides.²⁵ The locust infestation in 1958 overwhelmed the coping mechanisms of many peasants. As well, the outbreaks of malaria in the course of the famine in parts of Gojjam, Gamu Goffa and Tigray Provinces stretched and strained the capacities of the poor in these provinces to deal with the lethal interaction of hunger and disease.²⁶ The famine, reportedly, affected 1,000,000 people in Eritrea and Tigray alone. It created large scale migration of those affected by it to other districts in northern Ethiopia in desperate scrambles for food and employment.²⁷ Hundreds of

²⁴ Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterland," p.380.

²⁵ Oliver L. Troxel Jr., First Secretary of U.S. Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, No. 77, 4 September 1958, USNA, RG 59 (1955-1959), 875.00/9-458, Box 4879; No. 144, 13 November 1958, "Confidential Economic Survey, Ethiopia--July-September 1958," RG 59 (1955-1959), 875.00/11-1358, Box 4879.

²⁶ Oliver L. Troxel Jr. to Secretary of State, No. 140, 6 November 1958, "Weekly Economic Review--Week Ending November 6, 1958," RG. 59 (1955-59), Box 4879.

²⁷ Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, p.35. See also Ethiopian Red Cross Society to International

people died from the combination of food shortages and malaria.²⁸

The events of 1958 also reveal the role that grain merchants played in the breakdown of the ability of the rural poor to survive the interplay of hunger, malnutrition and disease. In June 1958, "considerable quantities" of local grain appeared in the markets of Addis Ababa after the government forecast good harvests for the November-December crop season and as food imported from abroad and emergency assistance obtained from the government of Sudan arrived in Ethiopia.²⁹ Grain merchants and commercial farmers, for whom famine provided opportunities for economic gain, abhorred state importation of food and acceptance of food from abroad to stabilize food prices during food crises. These sections of Imperial Ethiopian society often influenced the timing of state responses to famine and the quantity of food which the government requested from external sources to supplement national supplies.

The rural petitions for tax relief and food assistance in

League of the Red Cross Societies, 29 May 1959, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), -875.49/5-2959.

²⁸ The Ethiopian Students Union in North America, "Repression in Ethiopia," Cambridge, Massachusetts: Africa Research Group, January 1971, p.3.

²⁹ Oliver L. Troxel Jnr. to Secretary of State, No. 423, 13 June 1958, "Weekly Economic Review: Week Ending June 13, 1958," RG 59 (1955-59), Box 4879. See also Oliver L. Troxel Jnr. to Secretary of State, No. 445, 26 June 1958, RG 59, 875.00/6-2658, Box 4879.

1958 and the extensive response of the state demonstrate that the famine developed into a crisis which grain merchants could not encourage the Imperial Government to ignore. Unbearable hunger and the break-down of famine-coping mechanisms compelled peasants at Tole, a district to the east of Bacho, in Shoa Province, to appeal to the governor of Chabo and Gurage for tax relief. Their plea revealed their awareness of the crisis of governance in Ethiopia. The Tole peasants informed the governor that the survival of the state depended on the survival of peasants. As they argued:

it is only when the cultivator survives and when he . . . [can] pay taxes that both the government and the army survive. If we are unable to support ourselves and abandon our tidar [livelihood] it. . . [will] be. . . government that stands to lose.³⁰

The people of Bacho district sent a similar supplication, drenched with religious imagery, but devoid of political rhetoric, to the Emperor in 1958. Like their counterparts in Tole, they sought tax relief and state food assistance, arguing that they had experienced "hunger which even the disciples of our Lord could not bear."³¹

The response of the state to famine in 1958 illustrates the complicated process of balancing domestic needs and

³⁰ Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," p.403.

³¹ Ibid., p.402.

international policy. It took the Imperial cabinet several months to decide whether to relieve the famine, where to seek help and under what conditions Ethiopia should accept external assistance to augment local food supplies. Even while malaria accentuated the food shortages, creating lethal famine of enormous proportion in Ethiopia, the Imperial Government haggled over whether to seek food from the United States or the Soviet Union.³² According to American diplomatic sources, it was only in early September 1958 that the Imperial Government grew desperate enough to request American assistance. It did so when neither emergency assistance of 3,000 metric tons of sorghum from Sudan nor private imports of grain failed to relieve the acute food shortages.³³ And when American food assistance arrived, political considerations impelled the government to sell the food to soldiers and lower-income civil servants, possibly at a subsidized price.³⁴ The use of food by the Imperial Government to bolster political loyalties and mollify groups capable of using famine as a basis for revolt meant that those who did not have the

³² See Oliver L. Troxel Jnr. to Secretary of State, No.77, 4 September 1958, USNA, RG 59 (1955-1959), 875.00/9-458, Box 4879; No. 161, 1 December 1958, "IEG Requests Title II PL 480 Assistance," RG 59 (1955-59), Box 4879.

³³ See Oliver L. Troxel Jnr. to Secretary of State, No.77, 4 September 1958, USNA, RG 59 (1955-1959), 875.00/9-458, Box 4879; No. 144, 13 November 1958, RG 59, 875.00/11-1358, Box 4879.

³⁴ Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," p.381.

political strength or revolutionary potential to compel attention to their condition succumbed to starvation and disease during famines. Moreover, when the Ethiopian Government had to sell donated American wheat to obtain local currency to finance bilateral development projects, as was the case in September 1958, the negligible purchasing power of the rural poor prevented them from buying food.³⁵

Declining domestic food resources and the inability of the state to contain mass death from disease and starvation led the government to request 19,500 metric tonnes of additional American grain for Eritrea, Tigray and Harar in December 1958. However, the American government could not ship the urgently needed food from the United States to Ethiopia because the Emperor opposed key provisions in the American food agreement, principally end-use-checks, which he considered offensive to Ethiopia's national honour.³⁶ When he finally approved the relief agreement on 5 March 1959, the food arrived too late to avert deaths from starvation and to prevent the poor from leaving their homes in search of food. Their exodus created social conflict in the receiving villages and perpetuated famine in the labour-depleted villages. As in 1958, the sale of the donated food to finance development

³⁵ Oliver L. Troxel Jr., to Secretary of State, No. 311, 14 April 1959, "Economic Summary: Ethiopia, January-March 1959," USNA, RG 59 (1955-1959) DF, Box 4879, 875.00/4-1459.

³⁶ Oliver L. Troxel to Secretary of State, # 242, 16 February 1959, "Weekly Economic Review--Week Ending February 16, 1959," USNA, RG 59 (1955-1959), 875.00/2-1659, Box 4879.

projects put much of it beyond the reach of vulnerable groups in Eritrea and Tigray.³⁷

Further requests for American food in July 1959 suggest that the famine did not begin and end in 1958, but lasted much longer than the Emperor and his officials acknowledged in their public speeches. The Ethiopian Government's response to the worsening situation in 1959 demonstrates that when famine threatened to create a national crisis capable of besmirching the Emperor's image in foreign affairs, the state could act quickly. In July 1959, the Imperial Government acknowledged that the exaltation of its pride over and above the survival of the starving peasants from December 1958 to March 1959 had produced dire consequences. To prevent their recurrence, the Emperor approved a new agreement for 37,500 metric tonnes of additional American food "without delay" on 30 July 1959.³⁸

The Imperial Government publicized the famine a few days before the arrival of the first consignment of the American food in September 1959. The official acknowledgement of the famine also followed announcement of the Imperial family's donation of E\$ 6,000 for relief activities in Tigray.³⁹ As

³⁷ Oliver L. Troxel Jr., to Secretary of State, No. 311, 14 April 1959, "Economic Summary: Ethiopia, January-March 1959," USNA, RG 59 (1955-1959) DF, Box 4879, 875.00/4-1459.

³⁸ William Dale Fischer, First Secretary of American Embassy, Addis Ababa, No. 57, 11 September 1959, "Weekly Economic Review: Week Ending September 11, 1959," USNA, RG 59, (1955-59), -875.00/9-1159, Box 4879.

³⁹ Ibid.

usual, officials portrayed the famine as another natural disaster and interpreted state assistance as an act of grace.⁴⁰ This attitude towards the relief of famine demonstrates that the needs of the poor only outweighed the protection of Ethiopia's international image in the scales of Imperial priorities when satisfying them brought greater political credit to the Emperor and the Government than polishing the image of bountiful Ethiopia.

In 1959, the Imperial Government requested domestic financial contributions towards the state's relief efforts. However, the absence of a famine-relief agency--a product of the Imperial ideology of famine--affected its ability to appropriately utilize the financial contributions that the public made. Much of the total of 19,864 *Birr* collected for Tigray never reached the starving. Local officials used the public donations for public works. In some cases, they asked the Ministry of the Interior, after the critical phase of the famine, for permission to use the donations for ecclesiastical projects. According to Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, officials in Gamu Goffa, "not knowing what to do" with 1,635 *Birr* which they collected for famine-relief purposes, requested the Ministry of the Interior to permit them to use the money to repair churches in August 1959.⁴¹ In August 1961, two years after the

⁴⁰ Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, p.viii.

⁴¹ Ibid. p.36

conclusion of the lethal phase of the famine, officials in Kembata awraja, in southern Shoa, received instructions from the Office of the Governor of Shoa to use the 6,430 Birr which they collected for relief purposes in Tigray to buy a typewriter for the district office and to build a clinic for the district.⁴²

Impact of Lethal Famine on State Attitudes

The Imperial Government should have given more attention to lethal famine which constituted an immediate threat in Ethiopia than military security, the potential problem. Yet, famines in 1958 and 1959 neither radically changed the Imperial Government's attitude towards famine nor altered the scope, pace and direction of its agricultural policies. In fact, the Government conducted its post-1959 discussions on agriculture imbued with the conviction that famines were surprising developments sprung by fickle twists of fate on a rich and fertile empire.

Officials always found a convenient place to put the blame for famine. In 1958, they blamed grain traders for creating the food shortages by hoarding local grains, although state actions accentuated the food problem which grain merchants fully exploited. Concern about the impact of famine on Ethiopia's image in international affairs and the political

⁴² Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, p.36.

effects of food shortages in Addis Ababa occupied much more space in official discussions of famine than its deeper sources in government agricultural policy and other state actions.⁴³

Mass death from starvation in 1958 stimulated the government's interest in secondary issues such as in improvement of the storage and distribution of food. It did not cause the Government to study the most fundamental roots of the problem which were in land distribution, tax policy and its failure to develop a long term agricultural strategy. In April 1959, it appointed a committee of ministers and high ranking officials to recommend ways of preventing food shortages. The resulting memorandum underscored the need for a "government initiative" to reserve quantities of grain to meet "unexpected occurrences."⁴⁴ These discussions led to the establishment of the Ethiopian Grain Corporation in May 1960.⁴⁵

The abortive attempt to overthrow the Imperial Government on 13 December 1960 illustrated the political discontent that Ethiopia's undeveloped economy aroused among a new generation of officers with knowledge of other countries and their higher standards of living. Their coup partly represented a protest

⁴³ Imperial Ethiopian Government, Ministry of Agriculture, "Minutes of the Committee on Wheat Importation," 30 May 1960, Ministry of Agriculture Archives, Addis Ababa, File No. 3715/88.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," p.381.

against the limited scope of agrarian reform in Ethiopia and the government's failure to improve the capacity of peasants to survive famine.⁴⁶

Official Responses to Continuing Famine, 1960-72

The famines of the 1960s were widespread in Ethiopia and had deep roots in the depleted grain reserves and displacements of peasants caused by earlier famines. In 1962, heavy rains accelerated the breeding of locusts, which had invaded northern Ethiopia since 1952. They destroyed corn and sorghum crops in lowland Eritrea.⁴⁷ The Disease Control Department of the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture also reported heavy infestations of army worms in Wollo, Gojjam, Shoa, Arsi and Harar Provinces in July 1963.⁴⁸

Worms and locusts destroyed crops in Wollo Province creating lethal famine situations in Kombolcha, Wag, Lasta, Menz and Yifat districts. Drought aggravated existing low

⁴⁶ Author's interview with Dr. Berhanu Abebe, Professor of History, Department of History, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia, 10 November 1995. Berhanu Abebe observed the trial of the coup plotters in Addis Ababa and recalled that the leader of the coup, Mengistu Newaye, cited the poor conditions of Ethiopian peasants as one of the reasons for his attempt to overthrow the Imperial Government.

⁴⁷ Matthew Looram, American Consul in Asmara, No. 62, 9 February 1962, "Insect Damage to Crops in Eritrean Lowlands," USNA, RG 166 (1962-1965), 875a.23/2962, Box 92, Entry 5.

⁴⁸ Lloyd M. Adcock, Agricultural Attache, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, AGR. 3, 18 July 1963, ALERT, "Ethiopia: Army Worm Infestation," RG 166 (1962-1965), "Eritrea-Ethiopia. Agric.-Foreign Trade," Box 92, Entry 5.

intensity famine in Dangla and Debre Markos in Gojjam Province while fungus damaged food crops in Bonga districts, in Keffa Province. Pests and drought sustained famine in Gamu Goffa and Sidamo Provinces while inadequate rain in some districts and "heavy rains during harvests" in others damaged large fields of *teff*, wheat and barley in Beggemdir (Gondar) Province in 1964.⁴⁹ Crop destruction by pests caused famine in Adwa, Axum, Tembien, Raya and Azebo districts in Tigray Province. According to Dessalegn Rahmato, the province lost over 297,000 head of livestock to drought and disease.⁵⁰

Pest damage to food crops over-stretched rural famine-coping capacities in the early 1960s and government insensitivity to the situation bred peasant resentment. In what was clearly a protest against the neglect of the rural poor, and a reflection of the well-known official scepticism about peasant petitions, the villagers of Qalina, in South Shoa, mailed a sample of dead army worms to the Provincial Governor in Woliso in 1961. They explained their action by their desire "to show [the governor] what these worms look[ed] like and to help...[him] make [their] voices heard to those

⁴⁹ Lloyd M. Adcock, Agricultural Attache, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, AGR. 41, 6 March 1964, "Ethiopia: Grains and Feeds," USNA, RG 166 (1962-65) Box 93, Entry 5.

⁵⁰ Dessalegn Rahmato, "Neither Feast Nor Famine," in Ethiopia in Change, p. 200.

above...[him]." ⁵¹

It took the Imperial Government two months to respond to a similar appeal which the Director of Agriculture in Eritrea made to the Ministry of Agriculture in Addis Ababa for government spraying of fields infested by stink bugs in 1962. By the time Government acted, 80 percent of food crops in the affected districts of Eritrea had been destroyed. The affected peasants could only harvest the damaged crops before maturity and feed them to their livestock. No evidence has been found to explain the Government's delayed response. However, bureaucratic sloppiness and the Imperial attitude toward famine certainly hindered a timely state response.

On 6 February 1964, the chief of Agordat market in Eritrea reported serious food shortages and high prices of sorghum to the Governor-General of Eritrea. He warned the provincial governor that "difficulties will meet the public in Agordat for [the] fewness [sic] of [sorghum]." ⁵² Perhaps because of the familiar government apathy towards early warnings of famine, the agricultural inspector reinforced these reports to the Governor-General of Eritrea. In his follow-up report, he "begged" the government "to help the

⁵¹ The villagers of Awash-Ballo acted in a similar manner in 1965, sending a similar message to the Ministry of Agriculture through the local agricultural agent. See Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," p.404.

⁵² Lloyd M. Adcock, Agricultural Attache, U.S. Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, AGR. 41, 4 March 1964, "Ethiopia: Grain and Feeds," USNA, RG 166 (1962-65), Box 93, Entry 5.

people by importing dhurra from outside to save them from difficulties."⁵³ Earlier, on 8 November 1963, Dr. V. Nastas, Technical Director of the Eritrean Department of Agriculture, had sent a dossier on crop conditions in Eritrea to the Director-General of Agriculture. His letter had warned that crop production in the province would be "remarkably lower than average" during the 1963 harvest due to "several causes but mainly lack of rain at the proper time."⁵⁴

Famine swept across Eritrea in 1964, after all the warning signs were neglected by a Government more interested in the politics of keeping Eritrea within the Ethiopian empire and the prestige which would accrue to the Emperor from hosting the founding conference of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in May 1963. The anticipated presence in Addis Ababa of the thirty-two heads of independent African states for a high profile conference in which Emperor Haile Sellassie would play a pivotal role had once more pushed famine into the back-alleys to which it had always been consigned.

By September 1966, lethal famine had spread to many other parts of Ethiopia. As in previous famines, government officials had information about crop conditions and the famine-creation process long before their worst consequences became visible. And as usual, higher officials in Addis Ababa denied the existence of serious famine in the empire.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Typically, when lower-level officials in Wollo informed the Ministry of Interior in Addis Ababa, in September 1966, that 2,730 people had died of famine in a sub-district in Ambassel, in Wollo Province, officials of the ministry requested "a list of names of the dead."⁵⁵

District officials and the police in Wollo could no longer bear the sight of corpses "lying unburied" in the province and bombarded the Ministry of Interior with harrowing reports after September 1966. In many cases, the names of the dead were accompanied by warnings that unless the government acted soon and appropriately starvation could turn Wollo "into an uninhabited desert."⁵⁶ When 134 persons, some holding their babies, walked from Lasta, in Wollo, to Addis Ababa to present a petition to the government, officials of the Ministry of Interior swiftly collected and transported them back to Wollo.⁵⁷

The meagre sum--Birr 220,000--that the Emperor authorized the Minister of Finance to grant for relief activities in Wollo, suggested to Mesfin Wolde Mariam that higher officials failed to disclose the full dimensions of the famine to him.⁵⁸ This is doubtful. The Emperor had many sources

⁵⁵ Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, p.37.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.38.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp.37-38.

of news about the state of his empire. Contrary to Mesfin Wolde-Mariam's observation, the inadequate sum which the Emperor provided to relieve the famine shows that he did not consider it a political threat and chose to underplay it. This strategy became even more evident in his Throne Speech of 3 November 1966.

Despite the harrowing reports of famine deaths from Wollo that the Ministry of Interior possessed since September 1966, and the government's secret appeals for American food assistance, the Emperor pronounced 1966 a "sound" year for Ethiopia. He found the empire "strong and united," its "present life...encouraging" and its "future...bright and full of promise."⁵⁹ The irony, or perhaps the pathos, of the Emperor's speech could not have been more profound considering the famine that was raging in Ethiopia in 1966.

The Emperor's clean bill of health for Ethiopia had the further purpose of countering strong student agitation for land reform, which had begun in 1965 with a demonstration against the government, organized around the slogan "Land to the Tiller."⁶⁰ The 1966 Throne Speech also hid from Ethiopians

⁵⁹ Ministry of Information, Addis Ababa, "Speech From the Throne Delivered By His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I On the Opening Day of the Ethiopian Parliament," 3 November 1966.

⁶⁰ Addis Hiwet argues that the 1965 student demonstration against the Imperial Government in Addis Ababa was the first "massive and overtly political" student rebellion against the Emperor's government. Addis Hiwet, From Autocracy to Revolution (London: Review of African Political Economy, 1975), p.95. See also John Markakis and Nega Ayele, Class and Revolution in Ethiopia (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1978), p.50.

the difficulties which the Imperial Government had encountered in obtaining famine-relief assistance from the United States, the country that had been liberal in providing food aid to Ethiopia since 1958.

As the United States reviewed its policy toward Ethiopia, the Imperial Government moved to broaden its sources of relief assistance. In April 1965, it obtained 60,000 quintals (6,000 metric tonnes) of wheat from the U.N. World Food Programme (WFP). The Minister of Agriculture, Akalework Habte-Wolde explained on the radio, on 9 April 1965, that transportation difficulties and the hoarding of grain by traders and brokers had forced the government to seek food from the WFP.⁶¹ Certainly, some truck drivers refused to take relief food to particular administrative centres because of the precarious inter-village road networks.⁶² But transportation problems did not create the famine in 1965. They only complicated the process of relieving it. Once again, the Imperial Government located the causes of famine outside the domain of state policies and politics. This strategy of denying famine, playing down its scope and impact, or attributing it to climate, speculation, and transportation difficulties, could not negate or evade the Emperor's ultimate day of reckoning with the problem of famine in Ethiopia.

⁶¹ Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," p.397.

⁶² Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, p.38.

As in 1958, the state requested external food assistance in 1965 when circumstances forced it to do so. Tekalign-Wolde-Mariam has argued that the Ministry of Agriculture expressed serious concern about famine in 1965 and 1966 only "after urban food supplies. . . started to decline."⁶³ Apart from the political implications of food shortages in Addis Ababa, official responses to the famine were shaped by the great magnitude that famine assumed in 1966. Outbreaks of small pox, measles and malaria in the course of the famine put another roughly one and a half million lives at risk. Famine also created a "very delicate refugee problem in Western Ethiopia." The situation became serious because neither the Ethiopian nor the Sudanese government acknowledged the presence of thousands of starving people on Ethiopia's border with Sudan.⁶⁴

The Impact of the Continuing Famine on Official Attitudes

The famines of the 1960s finally forced the government to acknowledge the deficiencies of its agricultural development policies, although it did not cause it to recognize famine as Ethiopia's major problem. Even while recurrent lethal famines forced the Emperor and his officials

⁶³ Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," p.406

⁶⁴ William Hall, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, to AID, Washington, D.C., A-474, 16 November 1967, "War on Hunger--Expanded Use of Title II Food for Freedom Commodities," USNA, RG 166, "Ethiopia: Agric-Foreign Trade," Box 16, Entry 5.

to look outside Ethiopia for food, the Imperial Government cast shortfalls in food production as a universal problem facing countries which lacked capital to harness their enormous agricultural potential.⁶⁵

In the midst of continuing bouts of lethal famine in 1967, the Ethiopian Herald, a government newspaper, lauded the "progress" which the Emperor and his government had made in the "development" of agriculture in Ethiopia.⁶⁶ The newspaper pointed to a 16,000 hectare agricultural scheme in Eritrea, and a 16 million cubic meter dam in the province which would "transform 4,000 hectares of dry soil into fertile farmland."⁶⁷ Paradoxically, these agricultural development projects in Eritrea concentrated on the production of cotton and fruits, not for consumption in Ethiopia, but for export. In a province where the majority depended on sorghum for bread, these examples of agricultural "progress" were not only ironic but retrogressive.

In 1967, the Minister of Agriculture, Dejazmatch Girmatchew Tekle-Hawariat blamed Ethiopia's inability to harness its "great agricultural potential" on the rudimentary

⁶⁵ Haile Sellassie I, "Speech on Ethiopia's Second Five Year Plan and Envisaged Land Reform," Ethiopia Observer, 6, 4 (1963): 294.

⁶⁶ Edward Korry, Ambassador, American Embassy, Addis Ababa to AID, Washington, D.C., A-990, 25 April 1967, "Items of News Interest--Monthly Report," USNA, RG 166 (1962-67), "Ethiopia--Agric--Foreign Trade," Box 16, Entry 5.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

methods and equipment used by farmers.⁶⁸ In reality, the Imperial Government did very little to advance production technology in the subsistence economy of northern Ethiopia beyond exhorting extension officers to help farmers to modernise their production methods. The publicity given to state agricultural development efforts in 1967 came in the wake of the continuing student agitation for land reform. Shifting the blame for recurrent famine to peasant production technology, the Imperial Government refused to accept any responsibility for famines in Ethiopia and the deaths that resulted from them.

The negative consequences of food imports on Ethiopia's agricultural production became a major issue for the government in 1967. The Ministry of Agriculture championed cabinet efforts to address the problem. In its 1968 report to the Imperial cabinet, the Minister of Agriculture, Abebe Retta, blamed declining wheat and sorghum harvests in Tigray, Wollo, Eritrea and Gondar Provinces on the importation of wheat flour from Europe. According to the Minister, commercial farmers at Setit-Humera, in Gondar province, who extensively cultivated sorghum, did not harvest it in 1965 because of low prices caused by the importation of large quantities of sorghum and subsidized wheat flour into Ethiopia. Abebe Retta complained that about 22 percent of the imported wheat flour was actually potato flour. His complaint about adulteration of

⁶⁸ Ibid.

the imported wheat flour was not based on laboratory tests, but "the nature of the bread baked in Asmara."⁶⁹ The position of the Minister of Agriculture was that the importation of wheat flour threatened the production of wheat in Ethiopia. He advised that:

both the Ethiopian farmer and the industries that depend on the farmer's produce will benefit if private importation of wheat flour is prohibited and imports handled by the Ethiopian Grain Corporation which was established to help develop Ethiopian agriculture.⁷⁰

U.S. diplomatic sources corroborate the minister's view that food imports had interfered with the production and marketing of local grains. According to U.S. sources, by 1963 not only Gondar peasants, but also some peasants in Eritrea had stopped cultivating sorghum because of "heavy imports of sorghum from the United States."⁷¹ This situation had prompted U.S. officials in Addis Ababa to ask their Ethiopian counterparts in 1963 to address the problems affecting domestic food supply and those that cause the government to import food from abroad.⁷²

⁶⁹ Abebe Retta, Minister of Agriculture, Imperial Ethiopian Government, to Aklilu Habte-Wold, Prime Minister, "Emergency Memorandum On Importation of Wheat Flour," 17 July 1968, Ministry of Agriculture Archives, Addis Ababa, File No. 11443/62.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Lloyd M. Adcock, Agricultural Attache, U.S. Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, AGR. 26, 11 December 1963, "Ethiopia P.L. 480 Title II," RG 166 (1962-65), Box 93, Entry 5.

⁷² Ibid.

The concern of the Ministry of Agriculture seems to have resulted from official Ethiopian fears that unemployed farmers and peasants who would no longer find it profitable to cultivate wheat or sorghum would flock into the city.⁷³ Furthermore, concern that imported flour might put grain milling industries and local import-export traders out of business seemed paramount to a government in which big landlords and businessmen held influential positions.

Deepening of the Crisis, 1970-1973

No sooner had the famines of the 1960s subsided in many areas of the empire, than the famine of the 1970s began. Famine intensified in the densely populated central highlands of Wollo, Tigray, North Shoa and Eritrea, as well as Gamu Gofa, in the southwest. The high prices of food resulting from drought, pest activities and insurgency in Eritrea prompted the Governor-General of Eritrea to request the help of the American Consul in Asmara to buy 10,000 metric tonnes of sorghum from the United States to stabilize food prices in the province in January 1970.⁷⁴

According to U.S. Embassy reports, the heavy rainfall of

⁷³ Abebe Retta, Minister of Agriculture, Imperial Ethiopian Government, to Aklilu Habte-Wold, Prime Minister, "Emergency Memorandum On Importation of Wheat Flour," 17 July 1968, Ministry of Agriculture Archives, Addis Ababa, File No. 11443/62.

⁷⁴ M.E. Jackson, American Consul-General, Asmara, to Secretary of State, A-104, 14 January 1970, "Eritrean Economy in 1969," RG 166 (1969-70), Box 25, Entry 5.

about 11.57 inches during July and August 1970 ended an acute drought in Eritrea.⁷⁵ The ample rains restored the capacity of some vulnerable groups to cope with famine but did not overcome the food shortages caused by the insurgency in Eritrea. Revolts by peasants in Gojjam against agricultural income taxes, in 1968, created political turmoil in northwestern Ethiopia. Students in Addis Ababa also intensified their demonstrations against the government for its rejection of land reform and the worsening conditions of peasants.⁷⁶

The Imperial Government became aware of famine simmering in Ethiopia only before it became politically important enough to warrant state attention in 1973 and 1974. When officials of the Ethiopian Grain Board discussed rising wheat prices in the capital in May 1970, they acknowledged that "lack of rain" and "environmental factors" had engendered poor harvests and food scarcity throughout the empire.⁷⁷ A confidential United Nations report claims that Ethiopia's Council of Ministers knew about the Ministry of Agriculture's internal memorandum of November

⁷⁵ (?) Rabida, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, No. A-65, 26 October 1970, "Wrap-Up On Asmara Drought," RG 166 (1969-70) "Ethiopia-Agriculture-Textiles," Box 25, Entry 5.

⁷⁶ Addis Hiwet, Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution, - pp.100-101.

⁷⁷ The Grain Board to Abebe Retta, Minister of Agriculture, "Minutes of the Board Meeting," 21 May 1970, Ministry of Agriculture Archives, Addis Ababa, File A1/A7-2 V 2.

1972, which contained evidence of serious crop failures in parts of Tigray, Wollo and North Shoa, but did nothing about it.⁷⁸

The nation-wide failure of the *Belg* rains of February-March 1973, which peasants in the central highlands depended upon for food production, made lethal famine inevitable unless large quantities of grain were purchased outside Ethiopia. When the *Belg* rain failed in March 1973, an army of emaciated peasants and nomads, consisting of those who had exhausted their capacities to cope with famine, fled Wollo and Tigray, heading westwards to towns along the main highways in search of food and medicine.⁷⁹ By June 1973, as many as two million people were estimated to be affected by famine, and thousands of peasants were dead or dying from the interaction of hunger, malnutrition and cholera in Wollo. The situation got worse in June and September 1973, when the long rainy season *Meher* failed in many parts of Ethiopia. Had the Imperial Government imported large quantities of food to feed the poor or lessened the obligations of poor peasants to state and landlord, it could have saved many lives and strengthened the capacity of vulnerable groups to cope with the crises which preceded

⁷⁸ United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO), "Restricted" Agenda Item VI: Disaster Relief Coordination--Case Studies: The Drought in Ethiopia," May 1978. WFP Archives, Addis Ababa, File: United Nations Development Programme. This source is hereinafter cited as UNDRO Report.

⁷⁹ Author's tape interview with Tesfaye Mekasha Amare, ex-vice Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Imperial Ethiopian Government, Addis Ababa, 30 July 1995.

September 1973.

The scope of the disaster wrought by the droughts beggars the imagination. According to Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, between September 1973 and September 1974, "half of the cows, goats, sheep and camels, and two-fifths of the oxen, horses, donkeys and mules died" in Elkerre, in Bale province.⁸⁰ Before April 1974, 93% of the sheep, 90% of the cows, 86% of the goats, 72% of the oxen, 90% of the camels, 60% of the donkeys, and 95% of the mules died of lack of water and declining pasture in five awrajas in Wollo Province.⁸¹ The continuing deaths of plough oxen since 1966 and the considerable reduction of the rural labour force, through emigration or death from starvation, severely weakened the normal processes of food production in the hardest hit awrajas [districts] such as Ambassel, Qallu, Awsa, Raya and Qobbo and Yejju.⁸² Army worms and pest damage to crops, as well as the killing of emaciated livestock by hyenas, destroyed the resource base of Wollo rural society and accelerated the decline of the capacity of the very poor to cope with dramatic changes in an already precarious setting.⁸³

⁸⁰ Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, p.59.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., p.63

⁸³ Author's tape interviews with peasants at Wegel-Tena, Delanta woreda, North Wollo Administrative Zone, on their experiences during the famine that occurred in their district from 1972 to 1974, 14 October 1995.

The effects of the failure of the *Belg* and *Meher* rain of 1973 on the Afar nomads in eastern Wollo and Tigray were most devastating. Large numbers of nomadic Afars who lived in remote semi-desert areas died as a consequence of the loss of their cattle. Extreme conditions of starvation also forced some vulnerable groups to adopt desperate and untested survival strategies. Widespread consumption of cactus fruits and grain infected by ergot in Wadla- Delanta, in Wollo, killed or crippled many people.⁸⁴ About 1,374 cases of *neurolathyrism*, a disease that assaults the nervous system, caused by the consumption of *Lathyrus sativa*, a type of pea, were reported in three districts in Gonder.⁸⁵

The Politics of Famine Relief, 1973-74

As in the latter part of the 1960s, the early 1970s witnessed an escalation of the debate over food imports within the Imperial Government. Despite the widespread starvation in northern Ethiopia, commercial farmers at Chilalo district, in southern Ethiopia, expressed dismay that the government had imported about 400,000 quintals of wheat. In October 1972, the Chilalo farmers urged Dejazmatch Sahlu Difaye, the Governor of Arsi province, to defend the commercial production of wheat in

⁸⁴ Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, p.64.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Arsi from imports that pushed down wheat prices.⁸⁶ In their petition to the Imperial Government, the Chilalo commercial farmers argued that:

Today a quintal of wheat sells for \$14.00 in Addis Ababa, but it takes \$11.60 to produce that amount. . . . Without calculating interest owed to the bankers, expenses for maintenance of machinery or the depreciation of farm houses and implements, a farmer today spends \$232.00 per hectare. And this is irrespective of whether the harvest succeeds or fails. . . . But to say that we should hope for a profit of just \$0.40 per quintal in the best of years is tantamount to saying that we should abandon the whole thing and leave the field to the farmers of other countries.⁸⁷

For his part, Governor Sahlu went so far as to suggest to the Minister of the Interior, Getahoun Tessema, that he "re-export" grains already imported into the country.⁸⁸ Protests of this type highlight the pressures on the Emperor arising from the struggle of commercial farmers to benefit even at the expense of poor peasants. The Imperial Government constantly juggled competing interests as it attempted to relieve death from starvation in Wollo in the early 1970s.

Mesfin Wolde-Mariam and Dawit Wolde Giorgis have gone to great lengths to argue that the Emperor was not aware of the severe nature of the famines of 1973-1974.⁸⁹ They are wrong.

⁸⁶ Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," p.417.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.420.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.418.

⁸⁹ See Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, pp.42-43 and Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.259.

While an attempt was made to keep the Emperor ignorant about the famines, he learned of them and sought U.S. aid to relieve them when they threatened to embarrass him internationally. Mesfin Wolde-Mariam claims that the Emperor returned to Addis Ababa from a visit to Wollo in November 1972 "without realizing the... [existence of an] extremely ripe famine."⁹⁰ Drawing on evidence in Ethiopian archival records, he finds that "the people of Wello were not allowed to present a petition to the Emperor" and that a letter which parliamentarians from Wollo addressed to the Emperor prior to his visit there "apparently never reached him."⁹¹ As further proof of a conspiracy, Dawit claims that the Minister of the Interior, who the Emperor had sent to Wollo on a fact-finding mission, "underplayed the severity of the famine in his oral report to the Emperor" in May 1973.⁹²

Despite these attempts at exculpating the Emperor, it is clear that Haile Sellassie knew the fullest dimensions of famine in Ethiopia in the early 1970s. The Emperor would not have requested 28,000 tons of wheat from President Nixon, during his visit to the United States in May 1973, if he had no idea that the food situation was desperate. His request was

⁹⁰ Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, p.42.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.259. See also Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, p.42.

the product of the Minister of the Interior's briefing of May 1973 and led to a joint U.N.-Ethiopia assessment of the dimensions of famine in Ethiopia.⁹³ The Emperor and his officials did not consider famine and the loss of lives from starvation in Ethiopia as unusual. In 1973, they sought rather to limit the exposure of the magnitude of the starvation to the outside world.

At the height of the famine, in 1973, high government officials publicly underplayed the situation and claimed that the famine was "not serious. . . [enough] to warrant a request for international assistance."⁹⁴ But at Mersa, 30 kilometres south of Weldiya, in Wollo Province, and in Eritrea Province the food situation was "serious."⁹⁵ The condition of the Danakil nomads in the Robi region of Wollo was "really desperate." That desperation manifested itself in the hundreds of head of livestock which lay dead, and in the plight of the people, who had "practically no food except wild fruits." In

⁹³ See "AID Responses to Additional Questions of Senator Humphrey," in Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Disaster Relief: Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations on HR 12412 To Amend the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 to Authorize an Appropriation to Provide Disaster Relief, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction Assistance to Pakistan, Nicaragua, and the Sahelian Nations of Africa, 93rd Congress, 2nd Session, 29 March 1974, 67.

⁹⁴ Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, p.48.

⁹⁵ Christian Relief Committee, "Minutes of the Ad-Hoc Committee Held at Mekane Yessus Headquarters," Addis Ababa, 20 June 1973, Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA) Archives, Addis Ababa.

desperation, in April 1973, the Danakil nomads had begun to sell their guns--precious resources for nomadic life--hoping to buy food which never materialized.⁹⁶ While officials denied the seriousness of famine and the necessity for international assistance to the media, they considered the famine to be politically threatening enough to lead the Emperor to privately negotiate for food during his visit to the White House in May 1973.

Acknowledging famine was an embarrassment for a government that had since 1950 denied that famine was a serious problem in Ethiopia requiring a serious agricultural development effort. The newly-appointed Governor of Wollo, Legese Bezu, had denied reports of famine deaths in Wollo on Ethiopian television and, two months later, on 13 April 1974, argued in Parliament that public exhibition of images of starvation "exposes the country."⁹⁷

The Emperor and his government probably preferred a-low-profile domestic relief effort to external assistance that generated world-wide publicity. Having claimed nationally and internationally that he presided over a rich and fertile empire, worldwide publicity about the famine hurt His Majesty's international image. Yet the government could not

⁹⁶ Christian Relief Committee, "Minutes of the Ad-Hoc Committee Held at Mekane Yessus Headquarters," Addis Ababa, 9 July 1973, Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA) Archives, Addis Ababa.

⁹⁷ Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Rural Vulnerable to Famine, p.48.

avoid seeking international assistance. In April 1973, as the grim details of famine overwhelmed the government, it set up an Inter-Ministerial Committee to collect domestic contributions and coordinate external assistance for the relief of the famine.

Embarrassment over famine manifested itself in the politics of estimating the numbers affected. On 13 April 1973, the government informally appealed to the World Food Program for 20,000 tons of grain to feed an estimated 400,000 people believed to be in need in Wollo and Tigray.⁹⁸ The government commissioned report on the famine, issued before 13 April 1973, put the number of the famine-affected at 300,000. This was far less than the estimated figure of 738,285 reported by the Governor-General of Wollo and the Emperor's son, Crown Prince Asfa Wossen, to the Minister of the Interior, Getahoun Tessema.⁹⁹ Copies of this report had been sent to the Ministers of Finance, Community Development and Social Affairs, Agriculture and Public Health.¹⁰⁰

By April 1973, the Imperial Government could no longer prevent the exposure of the details of the famine. On 24 April 1973, the Amharic daily newspaper Addis Zemen published, for the first time, an article announcing that the government had

⁹⁸ UNDRO Report, p.2.

⁹⁹ Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, p.50.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p.49.

sent "10,000 quintals of grain to Wollo and North Shewa to help victims of drought."¹⁰¹ Students and faculty of Haile Sellassie I University (renamed Addis Ababa University in 1975) gave fuller details of the famine to the public.¹⁰² Through their University Famine Relief and Rehabilitation Organization (UFFRO), faculty and students collected 67,000 Birr and launched the first publicized large-scale domestic relief operation in Ethiopian history in May 1973.

The university students and faculty members used their humanitarian operations to intensify their criticism of the Imperial regime. Their exposure of starvation in Wollo and their defiance of the government radicalized on-going strikes by taxi drivers over increases in fuel prices, revolts by teachers and other civil servants over poor conditions of employment, and mutinies by soldiers over unpaid service benefits and poor conditions of service. These urban, campus and barrack revolts widened the cracks within the Imperial regime.¹⁰³ Stimulated by the relief efforts of the University, the Army and other organizations took their contributions directly to the victims of the famine. By mid-August 1973, thirteen feeding camps operated by provincial authorities, the Ethiopian Red Cross Society and other government ministries, sheltered about 60,000 people, mainly children, women and the

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.50.

¹⁰² Ibid. pp.46-47.

¹⁰³ Ibid. p. 47.

aged in Wollo.

Cracks in the Imperial Government

In January 1974, the Imperial Government ordered provincial administrators in Wollo to prevent the starving from leaving their homes.¹⁰⁴ It reasoned that in previous famines, the emigration of young people from famine-affected districts had perpetuated famine. Furthermore, the arrival of large numbers of famine-affected people in unaffected areas, seeking food and jobs, had often sparked social tensions. According to Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, local people who feared the spread of diseases or wanted to conserve their food resources, resisted the influx of the starving into their villages, often resulting in killings.¹⁰⁵ To help restore coping mechanisms, the Emperor also ordered the return of land to those who had sold it to survive famine. The government also provided cattle, seed, grain and medical assistance to the famine-affected in Wollo.¹⁰⁶

The Emperor's interventions to strengthen the capacities of vulnerable groups came too late to save the Emperor and his government from the mood of rebellion that now swept over urban labor, the University, Parliament and the Army. In the

¹⁰⁴ Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, p.41.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.59.

¹⁰⁶ Christian Relief Committee, "Minutes of the 37th Meeting," 28 January 1974, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa.

midst of famine, in April 1974, the dock workers at Assab port went on strike leading to the closure of the port for two weeks. The dock strike delayed the discharge of food from ships and the transportation of it to Wollo.¹⁰⁷ Protests by students and teachers against the government's educational reform proposal, strikes by taxi drivers over the increase in the price of fuel and mutinies by soldiers over conditions of service, which had begun in January 1974, galvanized the lame Parliament into action.¹⁰⁸ The conduct of several parliamentarians between January and September 1974 highlighted the emerging consciousness in Ethiopia that famine could no longer be accepted as the unavoidable consequence of the malfunctioning of nature, requiring Imperial munificence and international food aid as its appropriate response. Many came to view famine in Ethiopia as a product of government neglect and incompetence that should be criminalized by Parliament and punished by the courts.

The revolt in Parliament was the most palpable indication

¹⁰⁷ Christian Relief Committee, "Minutes of the 49th Meeting," 22 April 1974 and "Minutes of the 50th Meeting," 29 April 1974," CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa.

¹⁰⁸ The Imperial Government's educational reform proposal was aimed at making education in Ethiopia more responsive to the practical needs of the empire. It sought to refocus national priorities in education from academic pursuits at the tertiary level to vocational and technical training at the primary and secondary levels. Students and teachers interpreted the proposal in class terms. They saw it as a plot by the Imperial Government to perpetuate class domination by denying the children of the poor access to higher education and government jobs.

of the cracks developing within the Imperial Government. On 1 March 1973, Mohammed Madawa, the Member of Parliament for ElKerre, in Bale province, called for the trial of the Ministers of Agriculture, Finance and Interior. He based his charge on the failure of the ministers to respond to his 16 January 1973 appeal for immediate state assistance to save the lives of the starving and dying in ElKere. Their attitude, he alleged, had resulted in the needless death of 50 people.¹⁰⁹ The representatives of the pastoral Afars and Issas, W.M. Gebre Ab and Abdulai Kalib, joined in the new spirit of parliamentary militancy. They affirmed the right of the nomads in their districts to government assistance. The plea of the representatives for state assistance to the Afar and Issa nomadic communities, "just like the other regions of Ethiopia," highlighted the neglect of nomads during past famines and of the growing attention to the right to self-determination which the Afar people would assert in the-post-1974 period.¹¹⁰ The representatives of Ardi-Arquay, on the Gondar-Tigray border, Mehabe Natere and Asmamaw Tiruneh, decried the compulsion of people by district governors to pay

¹⁰⁹ Mohammed Madawa, Representative of El-Kere, to the President and Members of Parliament, "On Famine and Drought," 1 March 1974, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs Archives, Addis Ababa, Emergency Relief File.

¹¹⁰ W.M. Gebre-Ab and Abdulla Kalib, Representatives of Afars and Issas, to the President and Members of Parliament, 30 March 1974, "On Famine and Drought," Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs Archives, Addis Ababa, Emergency Relief File.

taxes in the midst of extreme famine. They called on the government to investigate and prosecute officials who failed to take action to relieve the famine.¹¹¹ The representatives for Gonder, Eritrea and Tigray supported their motion.

In the political and diplomatic history of Ethiopia, many officials had sacrificed their careers, and some American ambassadors in Ethiopia had been rebuffed, for advising the Emperor to reform land tenure and the political system.¹¹² Public officials who knew Haile Sellassie's style of leadership had followed the path he laid down and massaged his ego. In official circles, the whispered symbol of deference was "*Janhoy eshi ayloum*" (His Majesty won't approve).¹¹³ However, the actions of the parliamentarians in early 1974 demonstrate the evaporation of deference to the Emperor and the challenge to his authority that lethal famine in the early

¹¹¹ Mehabe Natere and Asmamaw Tiruneh, Representatives of-Ardi-Arquay region, Gonder-Tigray border, to the President of Parliament, 20 March 1974, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs Archives, Addis Ababa, Emergency Assistance File Vol. 1, No. 324.8.

¹¹² Author's tape interviews with Kebede Anissa (62 years), Journalist and former Head of Programs and Development in the Ministry of the Interior, Addis Ababa, 3 August 1995, and Professor Tadese Tamrat, Department of History, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, 23 November 1995. See also "Statement of Ambassador Edward Korry, Former [U.S.] Ambassador to Ethiopia...." in Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, 4,5 and 6 August 1976, p.47.

¹¹³ Author's tape interview with Tesfaye Mekasha Amare, ex-Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, Addis Ababa, 30 July 1995.

1970s engendered in Ethiopia.

From Urban Revolt to Armed Forces Mutiny

The famine of 1974 provided an opportunity for discontented groups in the armed forces to rise against the Imperial Government and to promote their demands in the name of the nomad, the peasant, the urban unemployed and oppressed ethnic and religious groups. Sensing the new mood in the country, the Emperor increased the salaries of members of the armed forces and police on 24 February 1974. On 27 February 1974, pressure from protesting civilians and soldiers must have caused the sudden resignation of the Imperial cabinet headed by Prime Minister Aklilu Habte Wold who had served in that position since 1961.¹¹⁴ But no evidence exists to suggest that the protesting soldiers and civilians wanted to take political power so early in 1974. At first, they sought only to draw attention to their respective group grievances and to compel the new cabinet, headed by Endalkatchew Makonnen, to

¹¹⁴ Andargachew Tiruneh, The Ethiopian Revolution, 1974-1987: A Transformation from an Aristocratic to a Totalitarian Autocracy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.41. Aklilu Habte Wold was born into a Shoan Church family. He was educated in France. For most of his career in the Imperial service, he dealt with foreign affairs. As Prime Minister since 1961, he helped to shape the policies of the Imperial Government and remained as one of its most influential officials. His brothers Akaleworq Habte-Wold and Makonnen Habte-Wold also held influential positions in the Imperial Government. Aklilu served as Vice-Minister of Pen, the Emperor's secretariat, from 1942-43, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1943 to 1958 and from 1960 to 1961, Deputy Prime-Minister from 1957 to 1961 and Prime Minister from 1961-1974. See Christopher Clapham, Haile-Selassie's Government, p.193.

redress them.¹¹⁵

The resignation of the Aklilu cabinet, accompanied by the reduction of fuel prices and the withdrawal of the education reform proposal, emboldened the more radical elements among the soldiers and civilians to form "committees" to identify group grievances and to seek their redress. While the Airbone Corps "committee" under Colonel Alem Zewd pledged its support for the Endalkatchew cabinet, a group of junior officers below the rank of Major, on 28 June 1974, established their own "committee" (*Dergue*, in Amharic) to coordinate the grievances of the Armed Forces, Police and Territorial Army.

Winston Churchill would have viewed the *Dergue* as another riddle wrapped in an enigma. It cloaked itself in such secrecy that scholars are still debating its numerical strength.¹¹⁶ It

¹¹⁵ Endalkatchew Makonnen belonged to the Shoan nobility. He was the son of Makonnen Endalkatchew, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia from 1943-1957. Endalkatchew was educated at Oxford University and served as Vice-Minister of Education, 1958-59, as Ethiopia's Ambassador to London, 1959-61, Minister of Commerce, 1961-66 and Ethiopia's Permanent Representative at the United Nations in 1966. He was Prime Minister of Ethiopia from 28 February 1974 to 22 July 1974. See Christopher Clapham, Haile-Selassie's Government, pp. 194, 196 and Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p.5.

¹¹⁶ The Ottaways, and Edmund Keller, put the *Dergue's* numerical composition at 120. See Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p.7., and Edmund J. Keller, Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People's Republic (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p.192. Christopher Clapham, and Dawit Wolde Giorgis, who later served in the military government, put the number at 108. See Christopher Clapham, Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.40., and Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, pp.12, 16. Andargatchew Tiruneh, a law professor at Addis Ababa University, believes the figure of 120 included the clerical

is certain that the *Dergue* consisted of enlisted men representing various units of the armed forces, police and territorial army, and that it operated with the assistance of some civilians. The *Dergue* was not mobilized by Major Mengistu Haile-Mariam, who became its undisputed leader in 1977. Its architect was Major Atnafu Abate, an Amhara from the 4th Infantry Division based in Addis Ababa.¹¹⁷ Some of its members received their first and comprehensive indoctrination in Maoism and Marxism-Leninism from the civilian intelligentsia.¹¹⁸

The *Dergue* initially demanded a new constitution and the prosecution of those Imperial officials who were alleged to have concealed the famine. While its program reinforced the grievances of its civilian counterparts and was couched in terms of upholding the Emperor's authority, the force with which it articulated its demands cast it as an alternative government.¹¹⁹ Reflective of the rapidly changing political culture in Ethiopia, some of the *Dergue's* radical junior officers appropriated the authority to arrest Imperial

staff of the *Dergue* but "the actual number...was 106." See Andargachew Tiruneh, The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987, p.64.

¹¹⁷ See Edmund J. Keller, Revolutionary Ethiopia, p.184; Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.18.

¹¹⁸ Author's tape interview with Tesfaye Mekasha, ex vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, on the origins and character of the *Dergue*, Addis Ababa, 30 July 1995.

¹¹⁹ Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p.5.

officials whom they accused of concealing the famine and delivered several of them to the Emperor as "enemies of Ethiopia" who should be prosecuted.¹²⁰

The *Dergue's* innocuous beginning masked divisions within it over the assumption of political power, who should lead Ethiopia and the best way to resolve the Eritrean and Ogadeni Somali quests for secession from Ethiopia.¹²¹ The *Dergue* could not reach a consensus on a proposal to overthrow the Emperor and his government when it discussed the subject in early July 1974.¹²² Its more radical members, including Mengistu Haile Mariam, began their gradual movement towards that goal by forcing the new cabinet under Endalkatchew Makonnen to resign on 22 July 1974.¹²³ They soon demonstrated their resolve to address the problem of famine in Ethiopia by pressuring the new cabinet under Mikael Imru, a progressive Shoan nobleman, to make relief assistance an obligation of the state to the

¹²⁰ Author's tape interview with Tesfaye Mekasha, ex-vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Addis Ababa, 30 July 1995.

¹²¹ See Andargachew Tiruneh, The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987, p.64; Paulos Milkias, "Mengistu Haile Mariam," p.49; Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p.7.

¹²² Andargachew Tiruneh, The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987, p.66.

¹²³ See Edmund J. Keller, Revolutionary Ethiopia, p.186. Keller argues that the *Dergue* forced the Endalkatchew cabinet out of office because of the cabinet's unresponsiveness to calls for reform, and the *Dergue's* suspicion that Endalkatchew was plotting against it. But according to the author's confidential sources, the demand for the resignation of the cabinet was a strategy used to test how the public might react to the overthrow of the Imperial Government.

people rather than a gift from a benevolent Emperor.¹²⁴ On 29 August 1974, the Imru cabinet reorganized the Inter-Ministerial Committee, which the Emperor appointed in April 1974 to respond to the raging famine, into a national famine-relief organization, the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission.

In September 1974, radical officers within the *Dergue* concluded that they, rather than their civilian counterparts, should become the leaders of a new Ethiopia. On 12 September 1974, instigated by Major Mengistu Haile-Mariam, they entered the Imperial palace, read out a proclamation deposing the Emperor, and whisked him away to detention in a Volkswagen vehicle. He was subsequently murdered in the presence of Majors Mengistu Haile Mariam and Atnafu Abate, then secretly buried in Addis Ababa.¹²⁵

The simultaneous removal of Mikael Imru as Prime Minister on 12 September 1974, and the elevation of the *Dergue*, by proclamation, into a Provisional Military Administrative

¹²⁴ *Lij* Mikael Imru (1926-) is a son of Ras Imru, a liberal member of the Shoan royal dynasty, and a cousin of the Emperor. He was educated at Oxford and later served as an administrator of the Ethiopian Planning Board from 1957 to 1959, as Vice-Minister of Agriculture from 1958 to 1959 and as Ethiopia's Ambassador to the United States from 1959 to 1961. He was Minister of Foreign Affairs for two months in 1961 before being sent to Moscow as Ambassador from 1965 to 1968. After service in Moscow, he represented Ethiopia at the United Nations Commission on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) between 1965 and 1968. He had a brief service as Prime Minister from 22 July to 12 September 1974. See the original of this modified profile of *Lij* Mikael in Christopher Clapham, Haile-Selassie's Government, p.197.

¹²⁵ Paulos Milkias, "Mengistu Haile Mariam: Profile of A Dictator," Ethiopian Review, (February 1994): 52.

Council (PMAC) to take over the reins of government, drew mixed responses. The establishment of the PMAC ended what many considered a corrupt regime. However, a government under soldiers who had been appendages of the old regime left many wondering whether the old era had really ended.

Conclusion

From 1950 to 1974, natural and human factors combined to cause starvation in Ethiopia under avoidable circumstances. The information Emperor Haile Sellassie and his cabinet possessed should have aroused their concern about the health of the empire's agriculture and Ethiopia's rural population. The Imperial Government's construal of famines as natural disasters temporarily convulsing a rich and fertile empire actually perpetuated the problem of famine. It distorted the way officials from the lowliest district and provincial offices all the way up to ministers in Addis Ababa handled such reports.

The attitude of the Ethiopian Government toward famine reflected the Imperial system's dilemma over balancing domestic and foreign policy while preserving the power of the Emperor and his circle. The organic crises within the Imperial state--the crisis of governance, the crisis of livelihood within the subsistence agricultural economy and the crisis of modernizing autocracy in a changing domestic and international atmosphere--became evident with each successive famine.

Although it paid scant attention to improving public welfare and modernizing peasant agriculture, it was the fluctuation that famine caused in urban food supplies, the security problems that emigration of the starving created, the opportunities that famine gave discontented groups to lash out at the government and the diplomatic rebukes that deaths from famine provoked from the United States that hastened the fall of the Imperial regime and precipitated a rethinking of famine in Ethiopia.

CHAPTER FOUR

FAMINE IN UNITED STATES RELATIONS WITH IMPERIAL ETHIOPIA, 1950-1974

Human beings, no matter how remote their homelands, must not be allowed to starve while there are means by which we can feed them.

C.D. McKenzie, President of the U.S.
National Millers Federation, 22 April
1946

Unless Ethiopia takes action and makes a much greater effort to do something about modernizing agriculture and increasing output of cash and other crops,...[it] may soon face a situation of perennial food scarcity.

Edward M. Korry, U.S. Ambassador to
Ethiopia, 15 September 1966

The Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act which Congress passed into law on 29 June 1954 established the legal framework for American responses to famine in Ethiopia in the post-World War II period. Popularly known as PL 480, the law empowered the President of the United States to use American "surplus agricultural commodities" to "improve the foreign relations of the United States" and to expand trade in those commodities with "friendly nations." By friendly nations, Congress meant "any country other than the USSR" or "any nation or area...[not] dominated or controlled by the...world communist movement."¹

¹ Congress, House, Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954, 83rd Congress, 2nd Session, 29 June 1954.

Title II of PL 480 dealt with "famine relief and other assistance." Under Section 202, the President of the United States could authorize the Commodity Credit Corporation to use its surplus commodities to relieve famine or emergency situations in friendly nations and assist "needy populations without regard to the friendliness of their governments."² Congress required such food to be identified "by appropriate markings as being furnished by the people of the United States of America."³

This chapter examines the interaction between the United States and Ethiopia in the field of famine-relief in Ethiopia. It analyzes what American officials knew about the causes and intensity of famine in the Ethiopian empire from 1950 to 1974. It puts in historical perspective when, how and why the United States provided food to relieve famines in Ethiopia and the impact of its famine-relief assistance. The central argument in the chapter is that notwithstanding the fact that commercial and political motives pervaded American agricultural policy and responses to famine in Ethiopia, self-interest was not the only motive driving American food assistance policy. The application of PL 480 in U.S.-Ethiopian

² Ibid., p.4. See also National Security Council, "Disposal Abroad of Government-Owned Agricultural Surpluses," 5 April 1954, USNA, RG 273, Records of the National Security Council, Policy Paper Files, NSC 5415/1.

³ Ibid. See also Peter Uvin, "Regime, Surplus, and Self-Interest: The International Politics of Food Aid," International Studies Quarterly 36 (1992): 306.

relations demonstrated that the willingness and capacity of American governments to provide famine-aid to Ethiopians depended on circumstances in both countries. The timely communication of warnings of famine from American officials in Ethiopia to their government in Washington and the accurate assessment of that information by Congress, the International Cooperation Administration (later the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the State Department, Office of Management and Budget, the National Security Council, and the Office of the President, among others, facilitated or impeded American responses. American officials in Ethiopia could only set the relief policymaking process in motion if the Ethiopian government shared its awareness of famine with them and sought American assistance to ameliorate it.

The United States and Famine in Ethiopia, 1950-1959

As we have already noted in chapter two, American Embassy despatches to Washington from 1950 to 1954 often painted Ethiopia as self-sufficient in food crops. In 1950, the American Ambassador to Ethiopia, George Merrel, urged the Truman Administration to consider Ethiopia as a country that could provide "a regular supply of food grains in the grain-short Middle East."⁴ Such perceptions appear to have been

⁴ George R. Merrel, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, No. 117, 16 November 1950, "Grains in Ethiopia," USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), Box 5387, 871.231/11-1650. See also Joseph Simonson, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, No. 272, 12 March 1954, "Empire of

based on the picture of Ethiopian agriculture that Embassy officials received or distilled from official Ethiopian sources, as we have already discussed in chapters one and two.⁵ Moreover, beneath the Embassy's legitimation of the myth of bounty lay intentions to present Ethiopia to American policy-makers as the ideal frontier for Point Four agricultural development assistance in Africa.

The American diplomats' portrait of Emperor Haile Sellassie as the embodiment of an the enlightened ruler who combined the best elements of tradition and modernity glowed only briefly. Perhaps to clarify the contradictory picture of Ethiopia, dissenting American and Ethiopian officials in Addis Ababa publicized the locust infestation of Ethiopia in 1952. The incident attracted the attention of the American press and received prominent mention in the Chicago Defender of 26 July 1952. The African-American newspaper bewailed the "invasion" of Ethiopia by "over-sized grasshoppers" whose weight bent the

Ethiopia: Summary of Current Economic Information," USNA, RG 166 (1950-1954), Box 141, 875.00/3-1254.

⁵ In 1954, the economic officer of the American Embassy wrote that "severe crop failures are not a characteristic of the Ethiopian agricultural scene except perhaps occasionally in limited areas due to the ravages of locusts, baboons, or disease of some kind." Regarding weather conditions, his informants told him that Ethiopia experiences "sufficiently uniform weather...to assure relatively normal crops...." See Donald F. Bigelow, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, No. 51, 25 February 1950, "Grains," USNA, RG 59, DF 1955-59,-875.231/2-2550, Box 5387 and Joseph Simonson, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, No. 124, 1 November 1954, "Food and Agricultural Report, USNA, RG 166, 875.20/11-154, Box 141.

branches of trees in numbers that "threatened to do to the country what Mussolini couldn't."⁶ The opposition of some nomadic groups and district sheiks to pest control measures assisted the spread of the desert locusts and contributed to the shortage of food in subsequent years. The locusts invaded Ethiopia as well as the Gulf of Aden, Iraq, and Jordan. Locust plagues in Ethiopia had prompted the American and Ethiopian governments to conclude a bilateral agreement, on 26 February 1952, to control the locusts in the empire. The American government provided aircraft and insecticides for aerial spraying while the Imperial Ethiopian Government paid the local expenses of the pest control program and provided trainees to work with an American entomologist.⁷ American diplomatic sources reveal that pastoral communities in the Danakil and the Ogaden, in southeastern Ethiopia, resisted the spraying of pesticides which contaminated their groundwater and pasture.⁸

⁶ Author unknown, Defender, Chicago, Illinois, 26 July 1952, in USNA, RG 469, Records of U.S. Foreign Assistance Agencies, -1948-61, Entry, Ethiopia, Box 2.

⁷ See R.G. Gatewood, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, n.d. USNA, RG 84: Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State (1950-1955), Box 8, and also Joseph Simonson, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, No. 19, 14 July 1954, USNA, RG 166 (1950-1954), Entry 2B, 875.00/7-1454, Box 12.

⁸ Oliver L. Troxel Jr., First Secretary of American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, No. 77, 4 September 1958. USNA, RG 59 (1955-1959) DF, 875.00/9-458, Box 4879.

Local resistance to control methods also undermined state efforts to contain an outbreak of rinderpest in 1954. The Emperor's offer of the free vaccination of cattle, and the parallel efforts of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and Point Four veterinary officers also failed to garner the support of cattle owners. Their refusal to cooperate was based on suspicion that the Imperial Government might use the records maintained by veterinary officers to tax them or to recover unpaid taxes.⁹ This strategy of peasant resistance aggravated the rinderpest outbreak and weakened the ability of many peasants to produce food. As heavy and unseasonable rain in 1954 accelerated the breeding of locusts in southeastern Ethiopia, drought caused extensive damage to Belg season wheat and other grains in the northeast.¹⁰

Famine in 1957 was the product of the interaction of pests, drought and the pre-existing rural social and economic conditions.¹¹ Its scope and intensity can be deduced from Haile Sellassie's private appeal, in April 1957, to visiting American envoy James Richards for 30,000 tons of American

⁹ See Joseph Simonson, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, No. 124, 1 November 1954, "Food and Agricultural Report," USNA, RG 166, 875.20/11-154, Box 141 and author's interview with a group of older peasants (above 65 years of age) at Kutaber, Kutaber woreda, North Wollo Administrative Zone, 19 October 1995.

¹⁰ Joseph Simonson to Secretary of State, No. 19, 14 July 1954, USNA, RG 166, (1950-1954), 875.00/7-1454, Entry 2B.

¹¹ Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," p.403.

wheat and corn, to relieve famine in various regions of Ethiopia.¹² The Emperor made this informal request for American relief assistance after formal discussions with James Richards which focused on Ethiopia's need for American military and radio communication equipment. The American Embassy in Addis Ababa must have put in the formal request to Washington for American famine-relief assistance on behalf of the Imperial Ethiopian Government on about 15 April 1957.¹³

Although the Embassy and USOM-E personnel knew the prevalence of drought and locust-infestation in Ethiopia, they could not fully determine their impact on crop yields beyond the information which Ethiopian officials offered. The frequency with which they revised their recommendations to Washington casts doubt upon the accuracy of their reports. In their 13 June 1958 report to Washington, based on Ethiopian "business sources," USOM-E and the Embassy had attributed the

¹² See "Aide Memoire," 15 April 1957, in "Country Files Prepared for the James P. Richards Mission to the Middle East, 1956-1957," USNA, RG 59 (1955-1959), Lot Files, No 57, D616, Box 13. James P. Richards, a Republican and an ex-Congressman from South Carolina, served as President Eisenhower's special envoy to promote the Eisenhower Doctrine, designed to combat communist activities in the Middle East. See John H. Spencer, Ethiopia at Bay: A Personal Account of the Haile Sellassie Years (Algonac, MI.: Reference Publications, Inc., 1984), p.291.

¹³ See "Cereals" [Probably drafted by the American Embassy in Addis Ababa on behalf of the Imperial Ethiopian Government], 15 April 1957, in "Country Files Prepared for the James P. Richards Mission to the Middle East, 1956-1957," USNA, RG 59 (1955-1959), Lot Files, No 57, D616, Box 13. The author has no indication that Washington fulfilled the food request.

"generally poor crops throughout the high plateau stretching from Addis Ababa north to Eritrea and west to Sudan" to "rainfall."¹⁴ However, the Embassy's 26 June, 3 July and 31 July 1958 despatches to the State Department, which clarified the 13 June report, blamed "grain merchants" for withholding food from the market, thereby making the "food shortage" appear worse than it really was.¹⁵ The Embassy's revised reports put national food losses from drought, locust infestation and heavy rains in mid-1958 below 15 percent. Embassy officials considered that food losses in Eritrea were more substantial than in other parts of the empire.¹⁶

The food shortage which the Embassy had considered as localized turned into lethal famine in many parts of the empire in August 1958. As it accurately reported, the locust infestation had already grown "out of control" in western and southern Eritrea by mid-1958 resulting in the destruction of many sorghum fields in Keren, in western Eritrea, where the

¹⁴ See Oliver L. Troxel, First Secretary of Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, No. 423, 13 June 1958, "Weekly Economic Review--Week Ending June 13, 1958," USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/6-1358, Box 4879.

¹⁵ Oliver L. Troxel, Jr., First Secretary of Embassy, to Secretary of State, No.445, 26 June 1958, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/6-2658, Box 4379; No.5, 3 July 1958, 875.00/7-358; Oliver L. Troxel [For the Ambassador], to Secretary of State, No.42, 31 July 1958, "Economic Survey, Ethiopia--April-June, 1958," RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/7-3158, Box 4879.

¹⁶ Oliver L. Troxel [For the Ambassador], to Secretary of State, No.42, 31 July 1958, "Economic Survey, Ethiopia--April-June, 1958," USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/7-3158, Box 4879.

bulk of Eritrea's sorghum crop was produced. From Eritrea, the locusts had spread to Beggemdir (Gondar), Tigray, Wollo and Gojjam creating the "worst infestation in several decades."¹⁷ As USOM-E sources reveal, two swarms of locusts believed to have come from the Ogaden desert had already destroyed food crops in Tigray, by the middle of 1958. Birds had also wrought havoc on rice crops in the Awash Valley, in northeastern Ethiopia.¹⁸

The new American Ambassador in Ethiopia, Don Bliss, who assumed office shortly after James Richards' visit to Ethiopia in April 1957, approached the Emperor and some of his officials, in the summer of 1958, to promise PL 480 Title II food assistance before the Imperial Government could request it.¹⁹ The American eagerness to help did not elicit any official Ethiopian enthusiasm to accept American assistance. According to Embassy sources, the Imperial Government's

¹⁷ Oliver L. Troxel, Jr., First Secretary of American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, Confidential Despatch No. 144, 13 November 1958, "Ethiopia: Economic Survey, July-September 1958," USNA, RG 59 (1955-1959), DF, 875.00/11-1358, Box 4879.

¹⁸ The U.S. Operation Mission in Ethiopia (USOM-E or Point Four) field officers reported serious damage to food crops by locusts in the vicinity of Dekamhare, in Eritrea. See U.S. Operation Mission to Ethiopia, "The Agriculture of Ethiopia: Report of [the] Staff of the Imperial Ethiopian College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts, and Agriculture Technical School, Jimma," vol. 6 (January 1959): 78-79.

¹⁹ See Oliver L. Troxel, Jr., to Secretary of State, No. 134, 30 October 1958, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/10-3058, Box 4879; No. 140, 6 November 1958, "Weekly Economic Review--Week Ending November 6, 1958," 875.00/11-658.

request for 5,000 tons of wheat, in September 1958, came after intense debate in the cabinet over the economic and political benefits of receiving American food. Embassy sources reveal that the debate occurred after the Minister of Commerce and Industry, Abebe Retta, had accepted "a Soviet offer of 5,000 tons of wheat at 25 pounds sterling. . . [per ton]." ²⁰ USOM-E records indicate that Abebe Retta found the US \$ 110 per ton cost of the American wheat, and the additional \$ 16 per ton freight charge to transport it by rail from Djibouti to Addis Ababa, more expensive than the Soviet alternative. The French government which owned and controlled the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway offered lower tariffs for all Ethiopian government imports. However, the railway company increased the cost of transporting the American wheat from an agreed \$ 9.60 per ton to \$ 16.00 after learning, through the Ethiopian press, that the wheat would be sold to the public. ²¹

Ambassador Don Bliss urged the Eisenhower Administration to make a timely and generous offer of American relief assistance to "support those in the Ethiopian Government...alert to the danger of Communist penetration, and

²⁰ Oliver L. Troxel, First Secretary of American Embassy, to Secretary of State, No.77, 4 September 1958, "Weekly Economic Review--Week Ending August 28, 1958," USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, Box 4879.

²¹ See Herman Kleine, Director, U.S. Operation Mission in Ethiopia, to International Cooperation Administrator, Washington, D.C., A-281, 30 September 1958, "Section 402, Wheat Transaction," USNA, RG 166 (1962-65), Entry 5, Box 93.

to discourage Soviet activity as much as possible.²² The Eisenhower Administration's diversion of 5,000 tons of American wheat, already on the high seas to the Government of Lebanon, on 4 September 1958, to relieve famine in Ethiopia was a classic case of the use of food to promote Cold War objectives. Delivery of the first consignment of 1,170 MT to Addis Ababa via Djibouti, on 17 September 1958, constituted the fastest response to famine in Ethiopia by the United States in the post-World War period.²³ Beside wheat, the American government provided 292,680 pounds of dried milk to the U.S. Catholic Relief Services for distribution in Ethiopia.²⁴ The American response to famine in Ethiopia neither guaranteed the Imperial Government's ideological loyalty under Cold War conditions nor discouraged Soviet activity in Ethiopia, as Ambassador Don Bliss hoped.

Prolonged rain, in May 1958, had created ideal conditions for the outbreak of "the most serious malaria epidemic in many

²² Oliver L. Troxel Jr., First Secretary of American Embassy, to Secretary of State, No. 77, 4 September 1958, USNA, RG 59-(1955-59), DF, Box 4879, 875.00/9-458; No. 144, 13 November 1958, "Economic Survey, Ethiopia--July-September, 1958," DF, Box 4879, 875.00/11-1358.

²³ See Oliver L. Troxel, Jr., to Secretary of State, No. 78, 4 September 1958, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59) DF, 875.00/9-458, Box 4879; No. 144, 13 November 1958, 875.00/11-1358; No. 93, 18 September 1958, "Weekly Economic Review--Week Ending September 18, 1958," 875.00/9-1858 and also "Wheat For Ethiopia," Ethiopia Observer, 3, 1 (February 1959): 29.

²⁴ William Dale Fisher, First Secretary of American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, No. 181, "Weekly Economic Review--Week Ending 31 December 1959," 31 December 1959, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), Box 4879, 875.00/12-3159.

years" during the famine.²⁵ Throughout September and November 1958 "as many as six deaths per day" occurred from malaria in the "large towns and villages" in the "lower reaches of the central plateau...."²⁶ The highest death toll from the lethal combination of malnutrition and malaria occurred in Bahr Dar, in Gojjam Province, in Mulu (possibly Mullo) and Zukuala (possibly Chuqalla), in Shoa Province, as well as parts of Gamu-Goffa Province.²⁷ USOM-E secured Washington's approval of the purchase of 6,000,000 anti-malaria tablets to meet a request for such assistance from the Ethiopian Ministry of Public Health (MPH). The distribution of the first 500,000 of the malaria tablets, on 12 November 1958, by USOM-E and MPH officials, helped to save thousands of lives in Ethiopia.²⁸ Nevertheless, the prevailing "malnutrition resulting from ... grain shortage" made it easier for the epidemic to claim "sixty thousand" lives in 1958.²⁹ For rural communities already battered by locusts and rinderpest, an assault by mosquitoes

²⁵ Oliver L. Troxel, Jr., [For the Ambassador] to Secretary of State, No. 140, 6 November 1958, "Weekly Economic Review--Week Ending November 6, 1958," USNA, RG 59 (1955-59) DF, 875.00/11-658, Box 4879.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ See Oliver L. Troxel Jr., to Secretary of State, 13 November 1958, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), "Weekly Economic Review--Week Ending 13 November 1958," 875.00/11-1358, Box 4879.

²⁹ Ibid. See also Joseph J. Wagner, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, No. 399, 29 June 1959, "Economic Assessment--1959," USNA, RG 59-(1955-59), DF, 875.00/6-2959.

made 1958 the most harrowing year in the recent memory of Ethiopians.³⁰

The ensuing request for additional American food assistance arose from perilous conditions in Ethiopia and not from ideological conversions among the members of the Imperial cabinet. Consistent with the Imperial Government's informal relief diplomacy, Foreign Minister Yilma Deressa conveyed Ethiopia's need for further American food in a private conversation with Ambassador Don Bliss on 26 November 1958.³¹ Embassy officials acknowledged that unlike June 1958, higher food prices since July were largely the result of "genuine scarcity" rather than "speculation."³² They did not, however,

³⁰ Author's interviews with Bayru Ayele (52 years) and Wolde-Birhan Hagos, in Aynalem Woreda in Southern Zone of Tigray Region, 23 September 1995; with Mulatu Gesese (71), Ayalew Kassa (80), in Yeduha Ketema in Shebel Bernta Woreda, in Gojjam Administrative Region, 4 October 1995, with 8 Elder Peasants (average age 60) at Ebinat, in Gondar Administrative Region, 7 October 1995; with 7 Elder Farmers (average age 60) at Wegel Tena Ketema, in Delanta Woreda, North Wollo Administrative Region, 14 October 1995.

³¹ See Oliver L. Troxel Jr. to Secretary of State, No. 161, 1 December 1958, "IEG Requests Title II PL 480 Assistance," USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), Box 4879. Yilma Deressa (1907-1974) was an Oromo official from a Wollega aristocratic family. He was educated in England before World War II, and for many years after the war, the only Ethiopian with training in economics. Christopher Clapham describes him as very active and astute and one of the most powerful Imperial officials. He was Minister of Finance from-1941-49 as well as in 1960, and Minister of Commerce, 1949-53, Ambassador to Washington, 1953-1958, and Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1958-1960. See Christopher Clapham, Haile Selassie's Government (London: Longmans, 1969), p.199.

³² See Oliver L. Troxel Jr. to Secretary of State, No. 144, 13 November 1958, "Confidential Economic Survey, Ethiopia, July-September 1958. USNA, RG 59 (1955-59),

discount the possibility that grain traders had seized on the situation for profit.

The eagerness of the American government to offer its food to relieve famine in Ethiopia did not mitigate its insistence on the basic requirements for receiving PL 480 assistance. It was over the application of the rules governing PL 480 Title II assistance that American formalism and Ethiopian informalism clashed, pushing nature-induced food shortages in 1958 and 1959 over the brink and causing mass death from starvation. Lethal famine compelled the Imperial Government to formally request American famine-relief assistance on 8 December 1958. The Minister of Commerce and Industry, Abebe Retta, submitted a documented request for 19,500 MT of American relief food to USOM-E on 17 December 1958. In the accompanying distribution plan, the IEG earmarked 10,000 MT for Eritrea and 9,500 MT for distribution in Tigray and Harar Provinces.³³

The International Cooperation Administration in Washington (ICA-W), which coordinated relief requests from Ethiopia, approved only the 10,000 MT of food requested for Eritrea. ICA-W's reduction of the amount of food approved for shipment to Ethiopia was the consequence of field survey

875.00/11-1358, Box 4879.

³³ See Oliver L. Troxel Jr. to Secretary of State, No. 311, 14 April 1959, "Economic Summary, Ethiopia--January--March 1959," USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/4-1459.

errors made by USOM-E officials in Ethiopia.³⁴ Both USOM-E and the American Embassy rejected the Imperial Government's 9,500 MT request for Harar and Tigray on the basis of an "unsatisfactory justification of need."³⁵ However, the Embassy showed more generosity than USOM-E by recommending the approval of 15,500 MT of the requested 19,500 MT to the State Department.³⁶

USOM-E's views must have prevailed in the final decision the ICA-W took to withhold the shipment of the 9,500 MT of food for Tigray and Harar. USOM-E officials had concluded, from field data, that unskilled labourers in western Eritrea, who lacked money to buy low-priced grain imported by private merchants from Sudan, bore the brunt of the famine.³⁷ Certainly, lack of purchasing power affected the diet and food consumption capacities of unskilled labourers in an empire where wages remained stable for some while food prices rose

³⁴ R. Sawyer, Acting Director of Technical Cooperation in Ethiopia, U.S. Operation Mission in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, to International Cooperation Administration, Washington, D.C., A-536, 12 December 1958, USNA, RG 166, Box 93.

³⁵ Edward J. Streater, Third Secretary of Embassy, to Secretary of State, No. 186, 22 December 1958, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59) 875.00/12-2258.

³⁶ Oliver Troxel, to Secretary of State, No. 311, 14 April 1959, "Economic Summary, Ethiopia--January--March 1959," USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/4-1459.

³⁷ See R. Sawyer, Acting Director of Technical Cooperation in Ethiopia, U.S. Operation Mission in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, to International Cooperation Administration, Washington, D.C., A-536, 12 December 1958, USNA, RG 166, Box 93.

for all.³⁸ Under these circumstances, Eritrean unskilled labourers suffered as much as their counterparts elsewhere in Ethiopia. In fact USOM-E's and Embassy reports of the continuing locust infestation in Eritrea, as well as the "poor harvests in other parts of the empire," should have constituted sufficient acknowledgement of the weakening of the food entitlements of peasants, pastoralists and unskilled labourers in Tigray and Harar.³⁹

The failure of the Imperial Government to document the need for additional food assistance did not mean that Tigray and Harar had sufficient food. Pest control in Ethiopia had proved to be a difficult task despite the efforts of Ethiopian and Eritrean locust control teams and FAO and USOM-E technicians. Permission granted by ICA-W to USOM-E to utilize the US\$ 138,250 which it obtained from the sale of American wheat to Ethiopia, in August 1958, put 20 vehicles, and more sprayers and insecticide in the hands of the locust control teams. Nevertheless, the locusts were at stages of their

³⁸ See Oliver L. Troxel Jr. to Secretary of State, No. 429, 18 June 1958, "Representative Data on Wages and Hours," USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.061/6-1858, p.2.

³⁹ See Oliver L. Troxel Jr., to Secretary of State, No. 144, 6 November 1958, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/11-1358 and William Dale Fisher, to Secretary of State, No. 98, 20 October 1959, "Economic Summary, Ethiopia--July--September, 1959," DF, Box 4879, 875.00/10-2059. "Oliver L. Troxel Jr., to Secretary of State, No. 311, 14 April 1959, "Economic Summary, Ethiopia--January--March 1959," RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/4-1459.

growth which made them difficult to kill by aerial and ground spraying. As Embassy officials acknowledged in 1963, people in Harar and Tigray Provinces suffered as much from locust ravages of crops and lack of purchasing power in 1958 as did peasants in Eritrea.⁴⁰

While the conflict over needs in Harar and Tigray highlighted errors of interpretation by USOM-E field assessors, leading to the accentuation of the famine in those regions, it also exposed a controversy over the terms of American assistance and the bureaucratic procedures involved. American officials in Addis Ababa and Washington noted that the Imperial Ethiopian Government disliked the complicated American aid procedures, especially the documentation of need and the control the United States exercised over its famine-relief programs.⁴¹ In December 1958, the Imperial cabinet decried Washington's request for further justification of need and the Emperor took offense at Washington's insistence that American personnel observe the distribution of the American

⁴⁰ Lloyd M. Adcock, Agricultural Attache, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, AGR. 3, 18 July 1963, ALERT, "Ethiopia: Army Worm Infestation," USNA, RG 166 (1962-1965), "Eritrea-Ethiopia. Agric.-Foreign Trade," Entry 5, Box 92.

⁴¹ National Security Council, "U.S. Policy Toward the Horn of Africa," 4 February 1959, USNA, RG 273: Records of the National Security Council, Policy Paper Files, NSC 5903; Oliver L. Troxel Jr. to Secretary of State, Despatch No. 242, 16 February 1959, "Weekly Economic Review--Week Ending 16 February 1959, 875.00/2-1659; Despatch No. 311, 14 April 1959, "Economic Summary,-Ethiopia--January--March 1959, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/4-1459.

food and conduct end-use checks. Emperor Haile Sellassie considered this American demand as "offensive to Ethiopian dignity and as evidence of a lack of trust in the Ethiopian Government."⁴²

Haile Sellassie refused his assent until the Eisenhower Administration accepted his alternate proposal on 5 March 1959. He instructed his ambassador in Washington to sign the food transfer authorization documents on the next day, on the basis that Ethiopian personnel would monitor the distribution of food and conduct end-use checks in accordance with American regulations.⁴³ The first consignment of 2,500 MT of food for Eritrea arrived in Massawa on 8 April 1959 and distribution began on 10 April, with the assistance of American soldiers at Kagnaw, in Asmara, the capital of Eritrea. The ICA-W also released the withheld 9,500 MT of wheat and sorghum for Tigray and Harar on 25 April 1959, after USOM-E accepted the Imperial Government's additional justification of need on 24 April.⁴⁴

⁴² Oliver L. Troxel Jr. to Secretary of State, No. 242, 26 February 1959, "Weekly Economic Review--Week Ending 16 February 1959," USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/2-1659. See also No. 311, 14 April 1959, "Economic Summary, Ethiopia--January--March 1959," RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/4-1459.

⁴³ See Oliver L. Troxel, Jr., First Secretary of American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, No. 279, 23 March 1959, "Weekly Economic Review--Week Ending 16 March 1959," USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/3-2359.

⁴⁴ See Oliver L. Troxel Jr., to Secretary of State, No 324, 24 April 1959, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, Box 4879, 875.00/4-2459 and Edward J. Streater, Jr. American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, 21 July 1959, "Economic Summary, Ethiopia--April--June 1959, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/7-2159.

The last 5,000 MT of the PL 480 food for Ethiopia arrived in Asmara on 22 July 1959.

Prompt delivery of American food and the IEG's mobilization of funds and food for Tigray "from...parts of the empire where surplus existed" did not prevent the death of many people from starvation.⁴⁵ The Ethiopian Red Cross Society argued that many subsistence peasants could not buy enough of the American food which was sold to generate local funds for economic development activities.⁴⁶ However, Oliver Troxel, first secretary of the American Embassy, blamed the "numerous deaths" on "inadequate coordination within the Ethiopian Government and delays that appeared...to...[have been] caused deliberately."⁴⁷ Troxel is right in his claim that delay in signing the transfer authorization caused many to die from starvation before American food arrived. However, his conclusion that the Emperor deliberately delayed his assent to the relief agreement because of his discomfort at seeing "United States personnel in contact with the. . . [Ethiopian] population during. . .end-use checks," fails to capture the

⁴⁵ Edward J. Streator, Jr. to Secretary of State, 21 July 1959, "Economic Summary, Ethiopia--April--June 1959, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/7-2159.

⁴⁶ Ethiopian Red Cross Society, to International League of Red Cross Societies, 29 May 1959, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, -875.49/5-2959. See also Mesfin Wolde Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, p.35.

⁴⁷ Oliver L. Troxel, Jr., to Secretary of State, No. 279, 23 March 1959, "Weekly Economic Review--Week Ending March 16, 1959," USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/3-2359.

fundamental motivations.⁴⁸

American personnel were in contact with Ethiopians when they had assisted in combatting locusts in July 1952 and distributing food and medicine in November 1958. In April 1959, American soldiers at Kagnaw, in Eritrea, helped to transport American food in their trucks to Addis Ababa, Harar, Dessie and Makalle when private transport owners in Ethiopia refused to cart relief food unless they secured "a return load" from their destinations.⁴⁹ And Troxel was correct when he implied that due to the practice of using food to bolster political loyalties, the objections to the traditional U.S. relief regulations were partly motivated by a desire to avoid end-use checks, which might have uncovered abuses of American food relief.

But the Emperor's opposition to American famine-relief regulations, between December 1958 and March 1959, had deeper roots. It reflected significant political differences with the United States rather than the projection of national pride. The Imperial Government had been dissatisfied with irregular American arms shipments since April 1957 and dismayed at U.S.

⁴⁸ Oliver L. Troxel Jr. to Secretary of State, No. 311, 14 April 1959, "Economic Summary, Ethiopia--January--March 1959, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/4-1459.

⁴⁹ Herman Kleine, Director, U.S. operation Mission to Ethiopia, to International Cooperation Administrator, Washington, D.C., A-281, 9/30/58, "Section 402, Wheat Transaction," USNA, RG 166-(1962-65), Entry 5, Box 93. See also Oliver L. Troxel, Jr., to Secretary of State, No. 313, 17 April 1959, "Weekly Economic Review: Week Ending 17 April 1959," RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/4-1759.

"opposition to Ethiopia on the problem of Somaliland."⁵⁰ Ambassador Don Bliss compounded the rift between Ethiopia and the United States over which territories an independent Somalia should occupy by his "fatal note of January 12, 1959" urging Ethiopia to accept Britain's "Greater Somaliland" proposal. Britain had proposed that a republic of Somalia should encompass British and Italian Somalilands as well as Somali lands under Ethiopia's control.⁵¹ John Spencer, the American citizen who served as an advisor on foreign affairs to the Imperial Government, argues that Don Bliss's endorsement of the British position on the territorial limits of an independent Somalia led to "a precipitous decline in U.S. relations with Ethiopia" and provided the reason for the Emperor's first visit to Moscow in 1959.⁵²

The delay in approving the relief agreement and the Emperor's opposition to its provisions also exposed the quiet Cold War diplomacy that characterized the American-Ethiopian relationship in the famine-relief arena. Cold War factors proved to be lethal under certain circumstances. In late 1958, the Eisenhower Administration made Ethiopian publicizing of American food assistance an essential requirement for receiving American assistance. In moral terms, this demand was

⁵⁰ See John H. Spencer, Ethiopia at Bay, pp. 291, 293.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.294.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 286, 293.

innocuous and appropriate. In legal terms, it fulfilled PL 480 food assistance regulations as much as "end use checks" assured Congress, and the American people, that their food assistance had reached its intended beneficiaries. The long term benefits of the publicity included the ability of subsequent American governments to justify future food assistance for Ethiopia. In ideological terms, it enhanced American prestige and political credibility when, in their time of need, recipients of American food assistance in Ethiopia recognized it as a gift of the government and people of the United States.⁵³ Given the delicate state of his new relationship with the Soviet Union, Haile Sellassie was reluctant to irritate Moscow by generating the required pro-American publicity. His acceptance of a four hundred million rouble Soviet loan in August 1959 made it even more awkward for him to enhance America's image in Ethiopia.⁵⁴

The Imperial Government also viewed public acknowledgement of American famine-relief assistance in domestic strategic terms. Publicizing American famine-relief assistance signified the failure of the Imperial state to

⁵³ Edward J. Streator, Jr. American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, 21 July 1959, "Economic Summary, Ethiopia--April--June 1959, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/7-2159.

⁵⁴ See "Radio Messages Broadcast From Guenet Leul Palace On August 28, 1959, and September 18, 1959 by His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, After His Extended State Visit to the United Arab Republic, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, Portugal and Yugoslavia, from June 24 to August 24, 1959," p.19. See also John Spencer, Ethiopia at Bay, p.309.

provide for its needy. Such publicity rendered the glorification of Ethiopia's richness and independent heritage superfluous as instruments for the promotion of national pride and the preservation of political stability.

In mid-1959, American policymakers in Washington valued continued food assistance to Ethiopia for its psychological benefits. They considered the saving of lives endangered by famine, and the positive effects that such philanthropy would have on America's reputation in the hearts and minds of Ethiopians, more important than reviving a pro-American attitude among the members of the Emperor's Government. While USOM-E and Embassy officials expressed their dismay at the IEG's cavalier attitude towards agricultural development efforts, the White House, the U.S. National Security Council and the Department of State viewed diminished American assistance as likely to lead to "unfavourable comparison. . . [of American efforts] with . . . [those of the Soviet] Bloc . . ." by the Ethiopian people.⁵⁵ Consequently, the Department of State instructed the American Embassy in Addis Ababa, in May 1959, to "seek IEG views" about the food situation in Ethiopia and ask if it needed further American assistance.⁵⁶ That policy theme at the Department of State partly explains why acting Minister of Agriculture Mikael Imru felt emboldened

⁵⁵ Department of State to American Embassy in Addis Ababa, 29 May 1959, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.49/5-2959.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

to approach USOM-E officials, in June 1959, to request additional American assistance.

USOM-E and Embassy officials approved only 26,500 MT of the Imperial Government's request for an additional 37,500 MT of American cereals, "to relieve food shortages."⁵⁷ USOM-E officials recommended 10,000 MT for Eritrea, where they felt the need was greatest, 9,000 MT for Tigray and 7,500 MT for Harar. They withheld recommendation of the remaining 11,000 MT of food for Tigray "pending receipt. . .of more complete explanation of need and of distribution plans."⁵⁸ The rise of acute starvation in the empire compelled the Imperial Government to sign the transfer authorization on 30 July 1959 without hesitation.⁵⁹ The first consignment of 10,000 MT arrived in Massawa in the last week of September 1959 and was transported immediately to its destinations in Eritrea and Tigray.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ See Edward J. Streator, Jr., [for Second Secretary of Embassy], to Secretary of State, No. 25, 31 July 1959, "Weekly Economic Review--Week Ending 31 July 1959: Title II PL 480 Assistance," USNA, RG 59 (1955-59) DF, 875.00/7-3159, Box 5387; and also William Dale Fisher, First Secretary of Embassy, to Secretary of State, No. 57, 11 September 1959, "Weekly Economic Review--Week Ending 11 September 1959, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59) DF, 875.00/9-1159, Box 5387.

⁵⁸ Edward J. Streator, Jr., Third Secretary of Embassy, to Secretary of State, No. 25, 31 July 1959, "Weekly Economic Review--Week Ending 31 July 1959: Title II PL 480 Assistance," USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/7-3159.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ See William Dale Fisher, First Secretary of Embassy, to Secretary of State, No. 98, 20 October 1959, "Economic Summary, Ethiopia--July--September, 1959," USNA, RG 59 (1955-

In his search for buttresses of fealty, the Emperor used American relief assistance to reinforce his domestic political agenda. The Ethiopian media publicized the famine as American food arrived in the empire. While they gave wide publicity to the E\$ 6,000 which the Imperial family donated to the Welfare Society in Makalle for relief activities in Tigray, the national media ignored the delivery of American relief grain to Tigray and the rest of Ethiopia. Nor did they report the 30,000 pounds of American powdered milk which the Eisenhower Administration gave to UNICEF for distribution in Tigray.⁶¹ The recipients of the American relief assistance perceived the donated food as the gracious gift of a benevolent Emperor, despite the American logos which adorned it.⁶²

The desire of USOM-E and Embassy officials to underwrite Ethiopian relief requests waned beginning in June 1959. By October 1959, the Eisenhower Administration had spent \$500,000 to transport by sea from the United States 19,500 MT of Title II food, estimated to be worth US\$3.4 million to relieve "grain shortages" caused by locusts in Eritrea, Tigray and

59) DF, 875.00/10-2059, Box 5387.

⁶¹ Thomas M. Recknagel, First Secretary of Embassy, to Secretary of State, No.67, 21 September 1959. USNA, RG 166, FASNR, "Ethiopia: Forest Products, Wool," 975.61/9-2159, Box 93, Entry 5.

⁶² Author's tape interview with a group of 12 Elder Peasants (average age 60) on pre-1974 peasant experiences of famine and state relief assistance in their districts, Kutaber ketema (town) in Kutaber woreda (district), North Wollo Administrative Zone, 20 October 1995.

Harar Provinces.⁶³ American officials in Addis Ababa who forwarded Ethiopia's food requests to Washington found a number of the new prestige projects which the Imperial Government undertook, in the midst of recurrent famine, extremely disquieting. The planned E\$ 10 million (US\$ 4m) paper mill project for Addis Ababa, a proposed E\$ 9.85m (US\$ 3.9m) Awash River survey project, planned construction of dams on the Blue Nile and Koka rivers, payments for military equipment and funding of "the Emperor's numerous European trips" aroused the Embassy's greatest ire. The Embassy regarded the Koka and Blue Nile dam projects as politically-motivated efforts to counter Egypt's construction of the Aswan dam, rather than economically-driven projects to improve peasant agriculture.⁶⁴

Changing Contexts of American Famine-Relief, 1960-1969

The United States took a second look at its goodwill toward Ethiopia at a critical moment in Ethiopia's famine experiences. The multi-lateral anti-locust campaign, in

⁶³ See National Security Council, "U.S. Policy Toward the Horn of Africa," 4 February 1959, USNA, RG 273, Policy Paper Files, NSC 5903.

⁶⁴ See Oliver L. Troxel, First Secretary of Embassy, to Secretary of State, No. 227, 2 February 1959, "Editorial Comment On Development of Blue Nile," USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.2614/2-259, Box 4881; No. 311, 14 April 1959, "A Statement by His Imperial Majesty Regarding the Nile River Waters," RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/4-1459; Edward Streater, Third Secretary of Embassy to Secretary of State, No. 19, "Economic Summary: Ethiopia, April-June 1959," 21 July 1959, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, 875.00/7-2159, Box 4879.

operation since 1952, had not resolved the locust problem in Ethiopia partly because of its narrow focus. An effective anti-locust operation should have covered Yemen, Iraq and Saudi Arabia because the entire Middle East region served as a fertile reservoir for the breeding of locusts, whose migratory habits enabled them to replace destroyed swarms in Ethiopia. Intermittent rainfall, and continued local opposition to ground and aerial spraying, assisted the survival of locust eggs and larvae. Drought and locust infestation combined to sustain lethal famine conditions in Tigray in October 1959 despite the relief efforts of the American and Ethiopian governments, assisted by the Soviet Red Cross, the Red Crescent, and the Canadian and Swedish Red Cross societies.⁶⁵

Locusts invaded the coast of Eritrea in "alarmingly large numbers" in 1960. The invasion coincided with stink bug damage to corn and sorghum crops covering 200 miles in lowland Eritrea.⁶⁶ The American Embassy in Addis Ababa confirmed the destruction of about 75 percent of the mature corn and sorghum crops in Dire-Dawa, Alemaya and Harar, in Harar Province, by locust and army worms. Army worms had been destroying crops in

⁶⁵ See William Dale Fisher, First Secretary of American Embassy, to Secretary of State, No. 88, 9 October 1959, "Weekly Economic Review: Week Ending 9 October 1959, USNA, RG 59 (1955-59), DF, Box 4879, 875.00/10-959.

⁶⁶ Matthew Loomam, American Consul in Asmara, No. 62, 9 February 1962, "Insect Damage to Crops in Eritrean Lowlands." USNA, RG 166 (1962-1965), 875a.23/2-962, Box 92, Entry 5.

Nazareth, Chabo, Gurage, Kersa, Tegulet, Bulga, Debre Zeit, Illu and Batcho districts, in the southern part of Shoa province, since 1958. In 1963, locusts, army worms and rodents destroyed about 20 percent of corn, sorghum, teff, wheat and barley crops in Shashamane, 150 km south of Addis Ababa.⁶⁷ The American charitable organization Catholic Relief Services (CRS) had distributed 3,578,582 pounds of corn meal, whole wheat flour, powdered milk and bulgar wheat to feed over 40,000 people in Eritrea and the rest of Ethiopia during FY 1962. The food, which was valued at US \$ 146,231, and was made available to the CRS by the American government under Title II of PL 480, did not resolve the growing food needs.⁶⁸

Ethiopian scholars such as Dessalegn Rahmato, Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, and Tekalign Wolde-Mariam have deservedly criticized the Imperial Government, on the basis of Ethiopian records, for its lax response to the well-documented reports of famine it received from district and provincial officials

⁶⁷ Ibid. See also Lloyd M. Adcock, Agricultural Attache, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, AGR. 3, 18 July 1963, *Alert*, "Ethiopia: Army Worm Infestation." USNA, RG 166: Foreign Agricultural Service, Narrative Reports 1962-1965, (Eritrea-Ethiopia. Agric.-Foreign Trade), Box 92, Entry 5.

⁶⁸ See Arthur L. Richards, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, No. A-178, 19 October 1962, "Report on Food Distributions by the Catholic Relief Services," USNA, RG 166-(1962-65), Box 92, Entry 5; and Lloyd M. Adcock, Agricultural Attache, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, AGR. 3, 18 July 1963, *Alert*, "Ethiopia: Army Worm Infestation." USNA, RG 166: Foreign Agricultural Service, Narrative Reports 1962-1965, (Eritrea-Ethiopia. Agric.-Foreign Trade), Box 92, Entry 5..

in the 1960s.⁶⁹ It appears from the American records, however, that the capacity of the Imperial Government to alleviate the lethal interaction of hunger and disease may have been considerably weakened by the ideological shifts and foreign policy reviews that took place under President Kennedy in 1963. The Emperor's lukewarm commitment to agricultural development had strained relations between the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture and American Point Four and Embassy officials since 1960.⁷⁰ But as the Emperor grew older, his failure to lay down clear rules of succession sustained concern in Washington about the sources of authority and decision-making within the Imperial Government.⁷¹

The attempted coup by senior officers of the Imperial Body Guard in December 1960 accentuated these concerns. David Newsom, a former American Assistant Secretary of State, has confirmed that the Emperor's antipathy towards the Crown Prince, and his disclosure to "close associates" that "he was not concerned with what happened after his ...death" made

⁶⁹ Mesfin Wolde- Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, - pp.37-39; Dessalegn Rahmato, "Neither Feast nor Famine," in Ethiopia in Change, pp.200-201; Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," pp.396-8.

⁷⁰ "Statement of Ambassador Edward Korry, Former U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia....," in Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, 94th Congress, 2nd Session on U.S. Relations with Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, 4, 5 and 6 August 1976, p.36.

⁷¹ National Security Council, Operations Coordinating Board Report, "U.S. Policy Toward the Horn of Africa," 13 July 1960, USNA, RG 273, OCB Report, NSC 5903, p.2.

American officials anticipate either radical political change as the Emperor's health declined or a succession dispute in the wake of his death.⁷² Rumours of coups in 1963 reinforced perceptions in Washington that "the Emperor cannot live or survive much longer."⁷³

In 1963, the new Democratic Administration under President John F. Kennedy narrowed U.S. interests in Ethiopia to providing protection of the American communication station at Kagnew, in Eritrea, and the 7,000 American citizens in the empire.⁷⁴ According to Ambassador Edward Korry, who served as U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia from March 1963 to June 1967, the Kennedy Administration instructed American diplomats in Addis Ababa to maintain cordial relations with the Emperor and anyone who might succeed him "by either evolution or revolution."⁷⁵

⁷² David D. Newsom, Diplomacy and the American Democracy (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1988), p.118.

⁷³ See Testimony of Edward Korry, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, in United States Senate, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, 94th Congress, 2nd Session on U.S. Relations with Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, 4-6 August 1976, p.37.

⁷⁴ Ibid. The American Community in Ethiopia, in 1963, consisted of diplomats, missionaries, peace corps volunteers, and about 3,000 American soldiers at Kagnew.

⁷⁵ "Statement of Ambassador Edward Korry, Former U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia....," in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, 94th Congress, 2nd Session on U.S. Relations with Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, 4, 5 and 6 August 1976, p.37.

As U.S. interest in Ethiopia declined and the attention of the Kennedy Administration shifted to the newly independent African nations, American officials in Addis Ababa had considerable liberty to shape American relief policy towards Ethiopia. In 1963, Ambassador Korry brought to the conduct of that policy his personal resolve to nudge the Emperor to decentralize power and reform landlord-tenant relations, developments which he considered "essential for stability-with-progress."⁷⁶ The Emperor resisted Korry's suggestions and often told him that his empire was not ready for "Jeffersonian democracy."⁷⁷

Frustrated by the Imperial Government's intransigence, American officials in Addis Ababa adopted tough attitudes towards Ethiopia's famine-relief requests in 1963. When the Imperial Government requested American sorghum and wheat to relieve continuing famine in Eritrea in 1963, Embassy officials asked to meet with the Director-General of the Ethiopian Technical Assistance Board (ETAB), Ato Gorfu Gebre-Medhin. At the meeting, Edmund Overend, Deputy Director, Arthur Tunnell, Controller, and Rolland Lorenz, Agricultural Adviser, of the new United States Agency for International Development Mission to Ethiopia (USAID-E, formerly USOM-E) told Ato Gorfu that the United States did not intend to make its famine-relief assistance to Ethiopia a permanent welfare

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 39, 46-47.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.47.

program. In that regard, the Imperial Government should determine how American famine relief assistance could be eliminated in Ethiopia.⁷⁸ They also pointed out the negative consequences of the unchecked flow of American sorghum and wheat on the production and marketing of those crops in the empire.⁷⁹

The declining interest of Eritrean farmers in cultivating sorghum because of the availability of cheaper American sorghum provided the background to the American complaint. It also reflected the evolving policy of the Kennedy Administration to discontinue unsuccessful American development programs in Ethiopia and to suspend famine-relief assistance which discouraged the production and the marketing of local foodstuffs.⁸⁰ The USAID-E officials could not tell the ETAB director when the final 1,000 MT of approved American sorghum to Eritrea would arrive when he sought the reasons for the delay of the shipment. The Embassy's summary of the meeting does not convey Ato Gorfu's reactions to the changing

⁷⁸ Lloyd M. Adcock, Agricultural Attache, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of Agriculture, AGR. 26, 11 December 1963, "Ethiopia: Title II, PL 480," USNA, RG 166 (1962-1965), Forest Product--Wool to EEC (1-3), Box 93, Entry 5.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Lloyd M. Adcock, Agricultural Attache, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, AGR-29, 17 April 1963, "Ethiopia: The Role of the United States in the Economic Development of Ethiopia," USNA, RG 166 (1962-65), Box 92; Frank R. Ellis, AID, Washington, D.C., to American Embassy, Addis Ababa, -A-446, 1 March 1964, "PL 480 Title II," USNA, RG 166. (1965-65), Box 92.

American attitude towards famine in Ethiopia.

Certainly, the United States re-thought its relief policy toward Ethiopia in the wake of nation-wide food shortages. Some American diplomatic sources acknowledge that famine engulfed "all provinces in Ethiopia, in the 1960s, except Keffa, Wollega and Illubabor."⁸¹ Further research by Dessalegn Rahmato, of the Institute of Development Research of Addis Ababa University, has revealed that Maji and Gimira awraja, in Keffa province, were not spared by the nation-wide famine of the 1960s.⁸² American sources disclose mass death from starvation in Kombolcha, Wag, Lasta, Menz and Yifat districts in Wollo Province, in northeastern Ethiopia.⁸³ Drought worsened existing famine conditions in Dangla and Debre Markos, in Gojjam Province, and Agordat, Mansura, Keren, Serai and Kerkabet, in Eritrea. Pests and untimely rains created acute famine conditions in Gardaula (Gidole), in Gamu Goffa Province and Abela, in Sidamo Province. In Beggemdir (Gondar) Province, inadequate rains in some areas and heavy rains during harvests in others damaged large fields of teff, wheat and barley in

⁸¹ USAID-E, "Operations Status Report," 30 June 1967, pp.15-16.

⁸² See Dessalegn Rahmato, "Neither Feast nor Famine" in Ethiopia in Change, p.200.

⁸³ Lloyd M. Adcock, Agricultural Attache, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of Agriculture, Alert Code 11, "Ethiopia: Army Worm Infestation," 18 July 1963, USNA, RG 166 (1962-65), Box 92, Entry 5. See also Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Rural Vulnerability to Famine, pp.37-39.

1964.⁸⁴ Pests caused extensive damage to cereal crops in Adwa, Axum, Tembien, Raya and Azebo in Tigray Province. The province lost over 297,000 livestock to drought and disease. That must have gravely affected the ability of peasants to cultivate their fields under Tigray's ox-plough agricultural system.⁸⁵

The dawn of Lyndon Johnson's Administration did not radically change American relief policy toward Ethiopia after the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963. Embassy officials and the new administration in Washington endorsed some of Ethiopia's requests for American relief food despite complaints against the Imperial Government by the CRS office in Addis Ababa. A Ministry of Finance (MOF) regulation enjoining foreign private voluntary agencies to obtain permits from custom authorities before clearing their relief food locked large quantities of CRS bulgur wheat in Ethiopian customs warehouses from November 1964 to August 1965. According to American sources, the MOF issued the regulation because of "irregularities" it contended existed in the relief activities of CRS and Caritas International.⁸⁶ The alleged

⁸⁴ Lloyd M. Adcock, Agricultural Attache, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, AGR. 41, 6 March 1964, "Ethiopia: Grains and Feeds". USNA, RG 166. Box 93, Entry 5.

⁸⁵ Dessalegn Rahmato, "Neither Feast nor Famine," in Abebe Zegeye and Siegfried Pausewang, Ethiopia in Change, p. 200.

⁸⁶ William H. Meinecke, Director of Aid Programs, Catholic Relief Services, Addis Ababa, to AID, Washington, D.C., "PL 480 Title III FY 1966 Program," 29 July 1965," USNA, RG 166 (1962-65), Box 92; Joseph A. Murphy, Controller, USAID-E to E.J. Roderick, Food For Peace Officer, USAID, Washington,

irregularities included "the sale of donated foodstuff," such as dry milk, on the open market. The USAID-E confirmed that irregularities had occurred in the CRS and Caritas programs, but could not trace their causes "due to inadequate Volagency [voluntary agency] accounting records."⁸⁷

The CRS attributed the MOF regulation to the Imperial Government's displeasure at CRS's independent relief activities in the insurgent province of Eritrea. When customs agents released the CRS wheat, in August 1965, 211 bags of wheat had gone bad because of "humidity and worms."⁸⁸ According to Edward Korry, the Imperial Government saw CRS food distribution activities in Eritrea, a province with a large Roman Catholic population, as smacking of religious favouritism.⁸⁹

Whatever the motive for the MOF regulation, the CRS complaint did not stop State Department and AID-W officials from approving 10,000 tons of American sorghum and 40,000 tons

D.C., 26 October 1966, "PL-480 Title III, Deterioration of Bulgur Wheat, CRS," RG 166 (1967), Box 16, Entry 5.

⁸⁷ Joseph A Murphy, Controller, USAID-E, to E.J. Roderick, Food for Peace Officer, AID-W, A-504, 26 October 1966, "PL-480 Title III, Deterioration of Bulgar Wheat, CRS," USNA, RG 166 (1967), Box 16, Entry 5.

⁸⁸ Joseph A Murphy, Controller, USAID-E, to E.J. Roderick, Food for Peace Officer, AID-W, A-504, 26 October 1966, "PL-480 Title III, Deterioration of Bulgar Wheat, CRS," USNA, RG 166 (1967), Box 16, Entry 5.

⁸⁹ Author's conversation with Edward Korry, former U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, 20 August 1997.

of bulgar wheat, on 10 December 1965, for Ethiopia.⁹⁰ The first 10,000 MT of the American food arrived in January 1966. It arrived on time to relieve an estimated 1.5 million people who faced famine and high food prices in Gondar, Bale, Shoa, Tigray and Arsi Provinces.⁹¹ According to Ambassador Korry, the United States provided the relief assistance as "a psychological boost" demonstrating the willingness of the people of the United States to help the people of Ethiopia in their time of need.⁹² The CRS complaint only caused the Embassy to tie the distribution of the remaining 40,000 MT, and any additional requests, to the results of the on-the-spot checks which American officials in Ethiopia conducted of the first consignment.⁹³ It appears that liberal American food assistance

⁹⁰ Edward M. Korry, Ambassador, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to AID, Washington, D.C., No. A-433, 9 December 1965, "Ethiopia/ Drought Emergency", USNA, RG 166 (1962-66), Agric.-Foreign Trade, Box 92. Entry 5. See also U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., Press Release, "Food For Peace," 15 December 1965, RG 166, (1962-65) USNA; Donald L Wolf, Counsellor for Economic Affairs, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, No. A-372, 15 December 1965, "Signing of PL 480 Title IV Wheat Agreement," RG 166 FASNR (1962-65), Box 93.

⁹¹ Edward M. Korry, Ambassador, American Embassy, to AID, Washington, D.C., A-990, 25 April 1966, "PL 480 Title II Section 201, Emergency Food Distribution", USNA, RG 166 (1967), Box 16, Entry 5; Donald L. Wolf, Economic Counsellor of American Embassy, 18 February 1966, "Economic Summary of Ethiopia: July-December 1965," USNA, RG 166 (1966-67), Box 17.

⁹² Edward M. Korry, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to AID, Washington, D.C., A-990, 25 April 1966, "PL 480 Title II Section 201, Emergency Food Distribution," USNA, RG 166 (1967), Box 16, Entry 5.

⁹³ See Edward M. Korry, Ambassador, American Embassy, to AID, Washington, D.C., A-641, 5 January 1966, "Timing of Shipments of Famine Relief Grain", USNA, RG 166. Narrative

to Ethiopia, in December 1965, demonstrated the lack of consensus in the new Johnson Administration over policy toward Ethiopia rather than the necessity of providing psychological boosts to the Ethiopian people.⁹⁴ In fact, the willingness of the Johnson Administration to provide psychological boosts to the Ethiopian people despite its differences with the Ethiopian Government soon evaporated.

In September 1966, Ambassador Edward Korry took the position that the solution to famine in Ethiopia lay in urgent reform of Ethiopia's agricultural economy, not in American charity. Queries from the Senate Agriculture Committee about the extent to which Ethiopia had used funds derived from the sale of PL 480 food for agricultural development, in May 1966, probably boosted the resolve of Ambassador Korry.⁹⁵ Korry's refusal to approve another Ethiopian request for 10,000 MT of American food to relieve food deficits in Eritrea, in September 1966, marked a brief, but critical turning point in American relief diplomacy in Ethiopia. Not only did he argue that the Imperial Government possessed the means to alleviate the food shortages in Eritrea, but he also warned the

Reports (1962-65), Box 16, Entry 5.

⁹⁴ For the struggle over economic policy towards Africa during the Kennedy-Johnson Administration, see Jeffrey Herbst, U.S. Economic Policy Toward Africa (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1992), pp. 2-7.

⁹⁵ Department of State, "Memorandum to American Embassy in Addis Ababa and Agency for International Development," 24 May 1966, USNA, RG 166 (1966-67), Box 17.

Emperor's government to "modernize agriculture and increase output of cash and other crops" to avert "perennial food scarcity" in the empire.⁹⁶ Korry's "confidential" joint Embassy and USAID-E message of 15 September 1966 to AID-W sternly advised the Agency to "utilize the current food scarcity...[in Ethiopia] as a means of driving home to the IEG the necessity...to develop and implement...a meaningful agricultural program."⁹⁷

Starting in September 1966, the convergence of Congressional pressure and Korry's view that U.S. policy should emphasize aid for economic development rather than assistance for political friendship changed the volume and context of American famine-relief assistance to Ethiopia. The Embassy and USAID-E refused to endorse any IEG food request that was not based on scientific data or accompanied by concrete plans to eradicate famine by improving agriculture. Consequently, the Imperial Government's request for an

⁹⁶ See Edward M. Korry, American Ambassador to Ethiopia, to H.E. Yilma Deressa, Minister of Finance, Imperial Ethiopian Government, 10 September 1966, as Enclosure I with Despatch No.-A-258, to AID, Washington, D.C., 15 September 1966, "Ethiopia: Grain and Feeds," USNA, RG 166 (1962-67), Box 17, Entry 5.

⁹⁷ Edward Korry, American Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Food For Peace Officer, AID, Washington, D.C., A-258, "Visit of H.E. Yilma Deressa, Minister of Finance--Joint Embassy/USAID Message," 15 September 1966, USNA, RG 166, FASNR (1967), Box 17, Entry 5. Prior to his departure for Washington, IEG Minister of Finance Yilma Deressa expressed a desire to call on AID-W on 22 and 23 September 1966 before attending a World Bank meeting in Washington from 24 to 30 September 1966. The joint message arrived in Washington before the Ethiopian delegation.

additional 100,000 MT to relieve food shortfalls in the-1966-67 crop year met with the most rigorous scrutiny by American officials in Ethiopia.⁹⁸ The Embassy and USAID-E requested estimates of the numbers of people who lacked food and the length of time that the affected people would require assistance. They limited their assistance to technical advice "to accurately determine the total dimension of the food supply problem" and to conduct a census of persons without income to obtain food from the local market.⁹⁹ As in September 1966, the Embassy and USAID-E's joint report to Washington in February 1967 cautioned that:

the...[difficult] food situation in Eritrea is a recurrent one and the IEG should be encouraged to take remedial action to increase food production. This can be done by utilising food recipients on a self-help basis as a labour force to undertake those rural improvements that will enhance future food production.¹⁰⁰

The agricultural experts of the USAID-E characterized crop conditions in 1967 as "generally good."¹⁰¹ They viewed reports of famine as only "isolated local situations" which could be easily alleviated "if... [the IEG] provided the cash"

⁹⁸ See Edward Korry, American Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, No. A-568, "Eritrea Famine Grain Request," 3 February 1967, USNA, RG 166: FASNR (1967), Box 17, Entry 5.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ See Edward Korry to Secretary of State, Enclosure 1 with Despatch No. A-568, 3 February 1967, "Eritrea Famine Grain Request," USNA, RG 166, (1967), Box 17, Entry 5.

to purchase local grains from Gojjam, Gondar and Wollo provinces where harvests were "expected to be 10...[percent] above normal."¹⁰² The hardline policies of Korry and Congress contributed to the Imperial Government's reflection on Ethiopia's agriculture in the late 1960s. Edward Korry left Ethiopia at a time in September 1967 when the Ethiopian and Swedish governments had started a pilot project for the development of peasant agriculture in Chilalo district, Arsi province.

The new American Ambassador to Ethiopia, William Hall, did not strictly pursue his predecessor's reform goals.¹⁰³ This reflected individual policy differences characteristic of American politics. However, Ambassador Hall also based his sympathetic attitude on humanitarian considerations like those that had led Ambassador Korry to endorse earlier Ethiopian aid requests, even as he criticized the Imperial Government's agricultural policies. Famine was increasingly evident in Ethiopia in 1967 as Embassy and USAID-E joint reports indicated in late 1966 and early 1967. Other Embassy sources had noted continuing outbreaks of small pox, measles and

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ William Hall, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to AID-W, Washington, D.C., A-474, 16 November 1967, "War on Hunger--Expanded Use of Title II Food for Freedom Commodities," USNA, RG 166-(1967-70), *Ethiopia: Agric.-Foreign Trade*, Box 16, Entry 5.

malaria which had killed many people in northern Ethiopia.¹⁰⁴ Hunger and disease had also pushed many peasants and pastoralists to the brink of destitution in western Ethiopia. The silence which the Ethiopian and Sudanese governments maintained about these grave problems in western Ethiopia had condemned thousands of the affected to death from starvation.¹⁰⁵ Drought, lack of seeds, the insurgent activities of the Eritrean Liberation Front and the closure of the Suez Canal had also hampered commercial and agricultural activities in Eritrea.

Ambassador Hall urged AID-W in November 1967 to provide food to relieve "malnutrition...among infants" and to resolve the "refugee problem in western Ethiopia."¹⁰⁶ The United States offered that humanitarian assistance through the Lutheran World Service. William Hall supported a food request which the Ethiopian Ministry of National Community Development submitted to the Embassy for the resettlement of the refugees in western Ethiopia on a community development project in Arba Minch. The

¹⁰⁴ See Donhausser, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Department of State, A-218, 13 October 1967, "Ethiopia: Pulses," USNA, RG 166 (1966-67), Box 17.

¹⁰⁵ William Hall, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to AID, Washington, D.C., A-474, 16 November 1967, "War on Hunger--Expanded Use of Title II Food for Freedom Commodities", USNA, RG 166, Narrative Reports, 1967-70, *Ethiopia: Agric.-Foreign Trade*, Box 16, Entry 5.

¹⁰⁶ William Hall, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to AID-W, Washington, D.C., A-474, 16 November 1967, "War on Hunger--Expanded Use of Title II Food for Freedom Commodities," USNA, RG 166-(1967-70), *Ethiopia: Agric.-Foreign Trade*, Box 16, Entry 5.

Ambassador endorsed the request because it fulfilled the self-help objective of relief decision-making that Congress and former Ambassador Korry insisted upon.¹⁰⁷

The Imperial Government's denial and suppression of reports of famine clearly evident in Ethiopian records were partly reactions to the ebb and flow of American famine-relief assistance to Ethiopia in the 1960s. Each admission of famine increased American pressure on the Imperial Ethiopian Government to reform Ethiopian agriculture. Foreign policy revisions in Washington and increasing demands on American food in other parts of the world also help to explain the Embassy and USAID-E's growing criticism of the Imperial Government's food requests in 1966 and 1967. Airlifts of American food to Nigeria from July 1966 to January 1970 to relieve war-induced starvation seem to have sapped American capacity to respond adequately to famine in Ethiopia.¹⁰⁸ These events open new vistas for examining the choices that were available to the Emperor's government as access to American food narrowed starting in 1966, and severe drought in 1968 and 1969 sustained starvation conditions in northern Ethiopia.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ For a detailed assessment of American food relief efforts during the Biafran war of secession, see Laurie Wiseberg, "Humanitarian Intervention: Lessons From the Nigerian Civil War," Human Rights Journal, 7, 1 (1974): 73.

¹⁰⁹ See M.E. Jackson, Asmara Consulate-General, Asmara, Eritrea, to Secretary of State, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, Secretary of Commerce and AID/W, A-104, 14 January 1970, "Eritrean Economy in 1969," USNA, RG 166, Narrative Reports,

The American Response to Famine in Ethiopia, 1970-74

Death from starvation continued in Ethiopia amid domestic conflict, the IEG's suppression of information about starvation and debates over American food assistance in Washington. Secessionist wars in Eritrea and the Ogaden and peasant revolts in Gojjam, Bale and Gondar made peaceful agricultural activities impossible in northern and southeastern Ethiopia in the early 1970s. Embassy personnel mistook "ample rainfall in July and August of 1970" in Eritrea as spelling the end of drought and famine conditions in the province. On the contrary, the rain did not restore the huge livestock losses, which also affected the production and distribution of food. Political tensions in Eritrea mounted, and the outbreak of cholera worsened living conditions in parts of Wollo, Eritrea and Tigray .¹¹⁰

U.S. policymakers knew about famine in northern Ethiopia long before Britain's Thames Television showed Jonathan Dimbleby's "The Unknown Famine," a documentary film about mass death from starvation in Ethiopia's Wollo Province, on 18 October 1973. The AID office in Washington shared its knowledge about lethal famine in northern Ethiopia with

1969-70, Box 25, Entry 5.

¹¹⁰ A.A. Rabida, American Consulate-General, Asmara, Eritrea, to Secretary of State, No. A-65, 26 October 1970, "Wrap-Up On Asmara Drought," USNA, RG 166 (1969-70), Ethiopia-Agriculture-Textiles, Box 25, Entry 5.

Congressional committees and staff members. According to Jack Shepherd, Embassy cables to the State Department in November 1972 documented the famine in "graphic detail."¹¹¹ The new US Ambassador to Ethiopia, Ross Adair, a former Republican Congressman from Indiana, failed to declare Ethiopia a disaster area until 3 December 1973, despite being approached in private to do so in November 1972 by "an Ethiopian official."¹¹² A declaration of an emergency by a U.S. Ambassador clears bureaucratic bottlenecks and opens channels for an immediate U.S. government response.

Ross Adair's ill-health must have contributed to his late declaration. Nevertheless, American officials in Ethiopia, in the 1970s, looked to the Imperial Government to deal with its famine problems, or, minimally, to officially acknowledge them and seek multilateral assistance. On its part, the Imperial Government weighed the diplomatic costs of openly publicizing famine without, perhaps, anticipating the domestic political consequences of equivocating. Kebede Anissa, an Ethiopian journalist, compiled the first comprehensive report on the lethal famine in northern Ethiopia for Ethiopia Television before Jonathan Dimpleby arrived in the summer of 1973. The ministers of Information and the Interior considered the

¹¹¹ See Jack Shepherd, The Politics of Starvation (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1975), pp. xi, 19-20, 43-44.

¹¹² See Jack Shepherd, The Politics of Starvation, pp. 17, 38, 40-3, 54.

details of Kebede's report as too prejudicial to Ethiopia's image and recommended only a censored broadcast of the highlights of the report. Soon after the Imperial cabinet learned of Dimbleby's visit to Wollo, and his secret departure from Ethiopia, the Emperor sent Tafari Wossen, a spokesman for the Ministry of Information, to London with instructions to underplay the importance of the Dimbleby film.¹¹³

In early April 1973, the USAID-E permitted the Imperial Government to divert 2,600 MT of American wheat earmarked for food-for work projects in Eritrea and Tigray to relieve starvation in Wollo. With the assistance of U.N. agencies in Addis Ababa, the Imperial Government estimated its total food requirements at 28,000 MT, a sum which the Emperor presented to President Nixon during his visit to the United States in May 1973.¹¹⁴

The Nixon Administration approved the delivery of 8,000 MT of American corn and sorghum to the Imperial Government and authorized another 10,000 MT through the World Food Program. The first 4,000 MT of the food granted on a bilateral basis to

¹¹³ Author's tape interviews with Ato Tafari Wossen, Public Relations Officer, Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), Addis Ababa, 15 March 1995 and Ato Kebede Anissa (62 years), Addis Ababa, 3 August 1995.

¹¹⁴ See "AID Responses to Additional Questions of Senator Humphrey," in Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Disaster Relief: Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations on HR 12412 to Amend the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 to Authorize an Appropriation to Provide Disaster Relief, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction Assistance to Pakistan, Nicaragua, and the Sahelian Nations of Africa, 93rd Congress, 2nd Session, 29 March 1974, p.67.

the Imperial Government arrived in Ethiopia in December 1973. As Marshall Wright, assistant secretary for Congressional relations at the State Department explained, the American pledge was "seven to eight months late" because of "heavy demands on shipping" that U.S. sales of wheat to the Soviet Union created.¹¹⁵

The human condition worsened in Ethiopia at a time when American funds for disaster relief had become a "political football" in Congress.¹¹⁶ President Nixon, reportedly, withdrew a White House initiative to seek funds for foreign disaster relief in 1973 because of its inconsistency with his veto of a domestic disaster relief bill in that year.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, the strong public support for foreign disaster relief demonstrated through opinion polls in the United States gave Congress the courage to formulate a comprehensive response to the famine in Ethiopia.¹¹⁸ But the public's humanitarian

¹¹⁵ See Jack Shepherd, The Politics of Starvation, pp.17, 38, 40-3, 54.

¹¹⁶ See Disaster Relief: Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, p.16 and also Edward M. Kennedy, Chairman, Subcommittee on Refugees, United States Senate, to Hon. Hubert H. Humphrey, Foreign Relations Committee, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 29 March 1974, on pp.55, 61,

¹¹⁷ See "Supplemental Statement of Roger Morris, Director, Humanitarian Policy Studies, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace," in Disaster Relief: Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, pp. 62-63.

¹¹⁸ "Prepared Statement of Senator Hubert H. Humphrey," in Disaster Relief: Hearings Before the Senate Committee on

impulses became ensnared in the legal and political wrangles of Congress. That became evident when the Senate Foreign Relations Committee met on 29 March 1974 to discuss a bill authorizing American relief assistance to Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nicaragua and the "drought-stricken Sahelian nations of Africa."

The bill limited the \$50 million Congressional appropriation for Africa to the nations of the West African Sahel, namely Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso (then Upper Volta) and Chad. Inclusion of Ethiopia among the "drought-stricken Sahelian nations of Africa," required an amendment of the authorizing language to "permit administrative discretion" in the use of the funds.¹¹⁹ It was only when the Senate Committee summoned the political will to remove the precise designation "Sahelian" from the bill that the United States could undertake a broader response to the Ethiopian situation. AID-W's Bureau for Africa sought more than \$5 million of the \$50 million appropriation for Africa to restore the food and livestock production potential of famine-affected regions of Ethiopia.¹²⁰

Foreign Relations, p.7.

¹¹⁹ See Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Disaster Relief: Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, pp.30-31.

¹²⁰ Testimonies of Mr. Samuel Adams, Head of the Africa Bureau of the Agency for International Development and Mr. Daniel Parker, Administrator of the Agency for International Development Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, in Disaster Relief: Hearing Before the Senate Committee on

The inclusion of Ethiopia in the disaster relief bill, however, revived old debates about American disaster relief efforts in Africa. While Roger Morris of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace lamented that the American foreign aid program had become a "permanent welfare situation" in Africa, Senator Herbert Humphrey (D-Minnesota), chairman of the Subcommittee on African Affairs, sought clarification from the AID Administrator, Daniel Parker, on "reports. . . [from Ethiopia] that grain is being held in warehouses by provincial governors and landlords while people starve[d]." ¹²¹ Senator Humphrey's concerns about the hoarding of food in Ethiopia and reports alleging that "relief ha[d]. . . not been equitably distributed" turned the Congressional discussion on Ethiopia to the search for an appropriate American response to famine in the empire. ¹²² Senator Humphrey and Mr. Adams of the AID preferred responses that went beyond charity to building-long-term sustainable solutions. As Samuel Adams put it:

humanitarian response to short term needs--while essential to the saving of human lives. . .--is alone insufficient. It is also important that provision be made for longer term development

Foreign Relations, pp.31-2.

¹²¹ Statement by Senator Herbert Humphrey, Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs, and Testimony of Roger Morris, Director, Humanitarian Policy Studies, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, in Disaster Relief: Hearing Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, pp. 33, 60.

¹²² "Prepared Statement of Senator Hubert H. Humphrey," in Disaster Relief: Hearing Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, p.6.

programs which can help re-establish. . .an acceptable condition of life and minimize the prospect for famine hanging in the balance of only slight variations in weather.¹²³

Samuel Adams urged the Nixon Administration to play a leading role in any international relief effort in Ethiopia and to have "a continuing concern even when the worst suffering is over."¹²⁴ AID-W's integration of emergency relief activities into long-term recovery and rehabilitation programs in Ethiopia included the establishment of an early warning system to predict famine, the improvement of transportation systems to facilitate the distribution of local and donated food, the building of food storage buildings in remote villages and the development of health and nutrition programs.¹²⁵ It hoped to use the additional 32,000 MT of corn, sorghum and corn soya-milk which the Nixon Administration granted it for relief activities in FY 1974 as the basis for an integrated rural development program.¹²⁶

AID-W's relief-to-development concept and the public

¹²³ "Prepared Statement of the Honourable Samuel C. Adams, Jr., Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Africa, AID," in Disaster Relief: Hearing Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, p.15.

¹²⁴ "Statement of Hon. Samuel C. Adams, Jr., Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Africa, AID," in Disaster Relief: Hearing Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, p.12.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p.13

¹²⁶ "Prepared Statement of the Honourable Samuel C Adams, Jr., Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Africa, AID.," in Disaster Relief: Hearing Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, p.17.

support for American humanitarian intervention in Ethiopia came at a time of national and international crises. Besides the global oil crisis of 1973, which affected the United States and Ethiopia, commercial exports of American food to the Soviet Union in 1973 and the decline of world grain stocks from about 165 million tons to approximately 82 million in 1974 raised questions about the management of American food reserves.¹²⁷ As Senator Humphrey rightly observed, the Senate hearing on foreign disaster relief in March 1974 highlighted a growing concern about "the adequacy of food in...[the United States], not only to meet...domestic needs but also...international commitments...."¹²⁸

Congress made its relief commitment in Ethiopia at a period when the empire was in a state of revolution. The 13,500 MT of food which the United States shipped to Ethiopia in June 1974 was its last major food shipment to the empire before the deposition of the Emperor in September 1974. Strikes by rail workers over wages immobilized about 18,000 MT of the American food at Djibouti in July 1974.¹²⁹ Facing urban insurrection and the threat of a coup, the Imperial Government

¹²⁷ Statement by Senator Hubert Humphrey before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Disaster Relief: Hearing Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 29 March 1974, p.54. See also Jack Shepherd, The Politics of Starvation, p.65.

¹²⁸ Statement by Senator Hubert Humphrey before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Disaster Relief: Hearing Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, p.54

¹²⁹ See Jack Shepherd, The Politics of Starvation, p.54.

could neither convince nor compel port and rail workers, as well as private truck drivers protesting low salaries and transport fares amid increased fuel prices, to speed up the distribution of relief food. It could also not release military and police trucks or other public vehicles to resolve the transportation problem because of the fuel crisis and the fluid political situation.

As in 1958, the transport of relief grain in 1974 became unattractive to private transport owners if they could not obtain "back-haul loads from drought areas of the north...."¹³⁰ USAID-E offered a special rate incentive to the National Transport Company (NATRACOR), an association of Ethiopian commercial transport owners, to encourage the transport of relief grain. The provision of US\$ 200,000 to NATRACOR to cart relief grain at \$5 a metric ton underscored the irony that ran beneath the reality of famine in rural Ethiopia and the calls for revolution from the urban areas. As Jack Shepherd laments, "Ethiopians were being paid bonuses... [by Americans] to deliver food" to the people in whose name striking transport owners sought political change.¹³¹

However commendable the USAID-E initiative, only a slight improvement occurred in the movement of food. With the breakdown of the central government in June 1974, and the rise of numerous contenders for power in the capital, district

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Jack Shepherd, The Politics of Starvation, p.55.

administrators refused to ensure that the grain transported into their domains was distributed to those who needed it most. In that period of political ferment, rebellion eclipsed relief, although famine shaped the context of both.¹³² As the American-predicted shift from evolution to revolution appeared on the horizon, the discomfort of being seen as sustaining a repudiated and collapsing regime, and the uncertainty of relations with the successor government, took precedence over maintaining America's leading role in a famine-relief effort that staggered under the contest for national leadership in Ethiopia.

¹³² "Prepared Statement of John H. Spencer, former Chief Adviser to the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs," in Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, 94th Congress, 2nd Session on U.S. Relations with Ethiopian and the Horn of Africa, 4, 5, and 6 August 1976, p.30. See also Jack Shepherd, The Politics of Starvation, p.49.

Conclusion

The ability of American administrations to respond to famine in Ethiopia depended as much on the interests of the Imperial Ethiopian Government as the influence of Congress, AID-E, the State Department and American officials in Ethiopia. American-Ethiopian relations in the area of famine relief from 1950 to September 1974 reflect the drama of two nations seeking a relationship organized around two issues: agricultural development (food) and military security (arms). It was in the food arena that the United States and Ethiopia frequently met to compete over the hearts and minds of the Ethiopian people. In the arms arena, only the Ethiopian state stood to gain in a framework of relations which the United States discouraged. As recurrent famine in Ethiopia frequently brought American and Ethiopian officials together for meetings, the Imperial Government exploited these interactions to seek more arms shipments. In those encounters, the Imperial Government frequently withheld its knowledge of starvation in Ethiopia and deliberately underestimated its magnitude to justify its view that American military assistance should be the top priority in American aid to Ethiopia.

In the 1950s, American famine-relief assistance provided a context for building a mutually beneficial relationship between Washington and Addis Ababa. Although Cold War politics often influenced the scope and timing of American famine-relief assistance, they did not always dominate the aid

agenda. In the 1960s and early 1970s, American leaders in the relief of famine in Ethiopia raised questions about how long the United States could sustain what was becoming a permanent American welfare program for Ethiopia. These questions became more compelling during the Kennedy-Johnson and Nixon-Ford Administrations. The United States and Ethiopia reassessed these concerns under new historical and political conditions from 1975 to 1991.

CHAPTER FIVE

REVOLUTIONARY POLITICS AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN ETHIOPIA, 1975-1991

In order to sustain the defunct reactionary regime and to promote its own selfish interest, U.S. imperialism provided economic assistance to the King.

Lt. Col. Mengistu Haile-Mariam,
Chairman of the Provisional
Military Administrative
Council, 16 June 1980

History does sometimes offer a second chance to take up opportunities missed in the past; but when it does, public impatience has a fatal propensity to spoil them once again.

Siegfried Pausewang, Rural
Development Options

Famine fuelled a political crisis in Ethiopia in the early 1970s. That crisis also generated an interest in eradicating famine. The army officers who seized power in 1974 initially showed a serious commitment to resolving the problems of famine and land tenure. In the process, they overlooked the importance of keeping in their minds, forever, that Ethiopian officials seeking to protect the reputation of their government had accentuated famine by denying its existence. Shortness of memory in this domain would prove their undoing in the 1980s.

This chapter examines how the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) sought to eradicate famine and why it failed. It concentrates on the principal features of

the agricultural policies of the government, their underlying assumptions and analyzes their implementation and consequences. It argues that the PMAC's misguided agricultural policies exacerbated problems which had existed before 1974 while spawning new crises in its struggle to consolidate the post-Imperial state. Above all, the manner and atmosphere in which it implemented these policies demoralized peasants and exposed the rural poor to various forms of exploitation which accelerated their vulnerability to death following the slightest deterioration in weather conditions.

In Search of A Leader and A New Organizing Principle

The "Ethiopia Tikdem" statement which the *Dergue*, also referred to as the PMAC, issued on 12 September 1974 described the land tenure system as "the basic problem" in Ethiopia which needed immediate reform to improve the conditions of peasants.¹ Many Ethiopians conceded that the military opposition was the most organized which had contested the rule of the Imperial regime in the wake of famine in 1974. However, the students and workers who cooperated with the army to hasten the downfall of the Imperial Government opposed military rule on principle and doubted the ability of soldiers to reorder Ethiopia.

¹ Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p. 57.

The military council initially demonstrated its uncertainty about its role in politics. Its statement of 15 September 1974 which urged the soldiers to return to their barracks highlighted the PMAC's awareness that the nation disapproved of a government led by soldiers.² Negussay Ayele, the Ethiopian political scientist, has argued that the PMAC invited some civilians to take over the leadership of the country, but that they declined the request.³ This not only confirmed the uncertainty of the military council about its role in the politics of post-Imperial Ethiopia, but also reflected the lack of consensus on the issue of leadership and policy among the PMAC's more than one hundred members. Mesfin Wolde-Mariam contends that some members of the military council were unwilling to accept the policies proposed by the civilians who accepted the PMAC's invitation to lead the revolution.⁴

The first civilian groups to publically demand the return of the soldiers to their barracks and the replacement of the PMAC with a "Provisional People's Government" were the leaders of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (CELU) and

² Ibid., p.58.

³ See Negussay Ayele, "The Ethiopian Revolution: Political Aspects of the Transition from PMAC to PDRE," in Marina Ottaway, ed., The Political Economy of Ethiopia (New York: Praeger, 1990), p.14.

⁴ Author's tape interview with Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Addis Ababa, 8 March 1995.

some university students at Addis Ababa University.⁵ That civilian demand, proclaimed on 16 September 1974, received support from some members of the Imperial Bodyguard, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Air Force and the Army Aviation Unit.⁶ However, some members of the PMAC indicated their intention to remain the guardians of the new Ethiopia through their hostile reactions to the demands for a people's government. Through threats, arrests, torture and extra-judicial killings, they repressed civilian opposition to the military council in the name of patriotism. By their actions, the radical forces within the PMAC gave a new meaning to the motto "Ethiopia Tikdem" (Ethiopia First) which had been adopted by the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police and Territorial Army in June 1974.⁷

Resistance to the new military administration also took the form of ethnic-based opposition and proposals for the reorganization of Ethiopia. The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) posed the first ethno-nationalist challenge to the PMAC. The left-wing intellectuals from Wollega administrative region who formed the OLF in October 1974 supported Eritrea's demand for

⁵ Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, pp.7, 59. See also John Markakis and Nega Ayele, Class and Revolution in Ethiopia, p.115.

⁶ Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p. 59.

⁷ John Markakis and Nega Ayele, Class and Revolution in Ethiopia, p.115; Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p.59.

an independent state. The OLF also affirmed the right of the Oromo people to determine their political and economic future in a "People's Democratic Republic of Oromia," an independent republic of the Oromo people to be carved out of the old Ethiopia.⁸ Events after October 1974 indicate that some members of the PMAC opposed ethnic nationalism and considered accession to the Oromo and Eritrean secessionists' demands as endorsement of the break-up of Ethiopia. In consonance with its "Ethiopia First" political slogan, and with its own self-preservation, the PMAC decreed a new penal code on 16 November 1974 mandating the death penalty for any opposition to its rule and any challenge to the traditional borders of Ethiopia. The code also authorized the death penalty for anyone who failed to act to prevent famine in post-Imperial Ethiopia.⁹

On 20 December 1974, the PMAC proclaimed that "Ethiopia Tikdem" meant Ethiopian Socialism and Ethiopian Socialism meant "equality; self reliance; the dignity of labour; the supremacy of the common good; and the indivisibility of Ethiopian unity."¹⁰ With its political legitimacy contested by students, labour leaders and ethnic-based political groups

⁸ See Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, The Ethiopian Revolution (London: Unwin Brothers, 1981), p.198.

⁹ See Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p.59 and also Fred Halliday and Maxime Molyneux, The Ethiopian Revolution, p.93.

¹⁰ Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, pp. 8, 63. See also Fred Halliday and Maxime Molyneux, The Ethiopian Revolution p. 88.

seeking a people's government, the choice of Ethiopian Socialism as the PMAC's political ideology partly responded to the Marxist-Leninist rhetoric of its civilian competitors. As Dawit Wolde Giorgis has observed, the declaration was "just what was needed to ensure the support of the intellectuals and students" who posed the most serious threat to the fledgling military regime.¹¹

Ethiopian Socialism and the Consolidation of the State

The declaration of *Ethiopian socialism* as Ethiopia's official ideology did not diminish the appeal of ethnicity as a framework of opposition to the PMAC. Nevertheless, the meanings of the "supremacy of the common good" and the "indivisibility of Ethiopian Unity" could not have been lost on the minds of those who viewed the deposition of Haile Sellassie in September 1974 as heralding a new era of individualism and ethnic self-assertion. The Penal Code of 16 November, the execution of 59 former officials of the Imperial Government, and the killing of General Aman Andom, the PMAC's first chairman on 23 November, in a skirmish with the troops sent to arrest him at his home, created an ominous political atmosphere for the affirmation of ethnic self-determination as an organizing principle.¹²

¹¹ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.25.

¹² Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, pp. 58-62.

As the Eritreans intensified their old demands for independence and the Oromos affirmed similar rights to self-determination, other ethnic groups revived or initiated their own political demands and suggestions for remaking Ethiopia. A new movement, the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), which emerged in February 1975 and aspired to form a new state combining Tigray and Eritrea, joined the armed struggle against the military government. The TPLF attracted young and educated Tigrayans and had a corps of leaders who combined Marxist rhetoric with their northern nationalism.¹³ The TPLF received arms and logistical support from the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF) to strengthen its resolve to overthrow the military government.¹⁴ This objective inevitably brought the TPLF and the PMAC into a long and protracted power struggle.

Besides the OLF and TPLF, the new regime faced renewed threats from the Western Somalia Liberation Front (WSLF) and other minor domestic opposition groups. In southeastern Ethiopia, the WSLF intensified its opposition to the PMAC with military and diplomatic assistance from the Somali government.¹⁵ With support from Somalia, the Afar Liberation

¹³ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p. 115-116. See also Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p.87.

¹⁴ Christopher Clapham, Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.246.

¹⁵ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.117.

Front (ALF) kept Afar marksmen in eastern Ethiopia active in ambushes of traffic on the road to Assab port--one of only two ports in Ethiopia. The ALF sabotaged rail traffic from Addis Ababa to Djibouti as it passed by the abodes of Afar nomads in Hararghe.¹⁶ The Gambella Peoples Liberation Movement (GPLM) opposed the military government from southwestern Ethiopia with the help of the Sudan government. The Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement (EPDM), a splinter group of the TPLF which also espoused Marxist-Leninist ideas, turned parts of Tigray, Gojjam and Gondar administrative regions into enclaves of opposition to the military administration.

The Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (EPRP), which emerged in August 1975, sought to integrate the ethnic-based opposition to the PMAC into a broad-based political challenge. The EPRP was formed by radical civilian intellectuals who had opposed the military regime through student demonstrations and industrial strikes in September 1974.¹⁷ Like the TPLF, the EPRP attracted the youth and the educated. It advocated an immediate return to civilian rule, a decentralized Ethiopian state and the adoption of a radical socialist transformation of Ethiopia. The All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (Me'ison), severed its initial alliance with the PMAC in August 1977 and opposed it on ideological grounds. Me'ison's ideological

¹⁶ John Markakis and Nega Ayele, Class and Revolution in Ethiopia, p.171.

¹⁷ John Markakis and Nega Ayele, Class and Revolution in Ethiopia, p.154.

grievances against the PMAC featured accusations for harbouring "pro-American" and "reactionary forces."¹⁸

Paradoxically, the PMAC and many of the Marxist-Leninist opposition groups had identical political and economic objectives.¹⁹ The "ideological conflicts" within the PMAC and between the EPRP and Me'ison were partly "personal feuds" which had developed between their members while they were students in Europe and North America.²⁰ As Marina and David Ottaway have appropriately observed, it took "considerable debate and open strife among different factions within the . . . [PMAC] and between it and more radical civilian groups," before the new military administration adopted Marxism-Leninism as the ideology of the Ethiopian revolution.²¹

While the Marxist-Leninist ideas of the intellectuals within the PMAC outflanked the ideological demands of the civilian opponents of the military council, the patriotic ethic of the PMAC's soldier members did not pacify their opponents. In 1977, the ideological conflicts deteriorated to the point of mutual annihilation. The EPRP orchestrated rural and urban terror against supporters and members of the PMAC.

¹⁸ Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, The Ethiopian Revolution, p.133.

¹⁹ Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p.101. See also Edmund Keller, Revolutionary Ethiopia, p.199.

²⁰ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.27.

²¹ Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p.8.

What it characterized as a "White Terror" campaign of political assassinations against the PMAC and its supporters provoked the PMAC's "Red Terror" counter-campaign of annihilation of the EPRP and its supporters in February 1977.²² By the end of 1977, the PMAC had almost eliminated or absorbed the EPRP and other left-wing opposition groups.²³ However, the ultra-left rhetoric of its civilian opponents created a complex political environment in which the military regime groped for ideological direction and political survival.²⁴

Radical members of the PMAC used terror against civilian opponents and purged moderates within their ranks to consolidate military rule. The assassination of General Teferi Bante, on 3 February 1977, was the most dramatic of the PMAC's killings of the moderates within its ranks and the clearest indication of how its radical members employed terror and assassination to induce compliance with their vision of a new Ethiopia. General Teferi, an Oromo, who succeeded General Aman Andom as leader of the PMAC, was, reportedly, eliminated for endorsing cooperation with civilian opposition groups in a public speech on 30 January 1977.²⁵ The assassination of Teferi Bante, and the emergence of Mengistu Haile-Mariam, first vice-

²² See Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, The Ethiopian Revolution, p.120.

²³ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.60.

²⁴ Ibid., p.24.

²⁵ See Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, The Ethiopian Revolution, p. 114.

chairman of the PMAC, as leader of the military administration partially resolved the initial dissension within the PMAC over leadership and ideology.

Foreign observers of the incipient revolution saw Mengistu as the "strong man" in the military council. They described him as "a self-educated socialist" who stood to the left of General Aman Andom in his political views, but was much less radical than many of the junior officers of the military administration.²⁶ Paulos Milkias, an Ethiopian political scientist, sees a subtle interplay between Mengistu's social background and his political ideology. As a poorly educated southerner and the son of a servant in Ethiopia's stratified society, Mengistu harboured a strong feeling against aristocratic privilege and vowed to make those in Ethiopian society who held others in contempt because of their dark colour and occupation "stoop and grind corn."²⁷ Mengistu made his vision of a new Ethiopia clear in his passionate denunciation of corruption, disunity and social

²⁶ World Bank, Office Memorandum, "Ethiopia: Recent Political Developments and Bank Operations," 13 December 1974, Ministry of National Resources Development and Environmental Protection Archives, Addis Ababa. Dawit argues that Mengistu obtained his rudimentary knowledge of Socialism from the Ethiopian Marxist scholar, Haile Fida, whom Mengistu ordered to be executed in July 1979. See Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, pp.50-51.

²⁷ See Paulos Milkias, "Mengistu Haile Mariam: Profile of a Dictator, Ethiopian Review, (February 1994): 46, and Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p. 135. Mengistu elaborates on his view of Ethiopian society in his "Report Delivered to the First Congress of COPWE," Addis Ababa, 16 June 1980, pp.7-8.

hierarchy in Ethiopia at the first meeting of the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police and Territorial Army on 28 June 1974.

Revolutionary Politics and Agricultural Policy

Despite the fact that it seized power in the midst of famine, the content of the PMAC's declared ideology offered no clear indication of the direction of its agricultural policy. The PMAC formulated its agricultural policy by drawing ideas from the contemporary discourse on famine in Ethiopia and implemented it in a volatile political atmosphere. Before 1974, Ethiopian students and intellectuals, at home and abroad, had conceived of the land tenure system and the exploitation of poor peasants by state and landlord as the major causes of famine in Ethiopia.²⁸ In the course of the 1960s and 1970s, students and the intelligentsia believed that to give land to the tiller was to break the power of landlords and release peasant energies to produce food in abundance.²⁹ Ethiopian students and intellectuals had since 1965 sought a

²⁸ See Siegfried Pausewang, "Meret Le Arrashu" Land Tenure and Access to Land: A Socio-historical Overview," in Siegfried Pausewang et al., Ethiopia: Rural Development Options, p.44; Randi Ronning Balsvik, "An Important Root of the Ethiopian Revolution: The Student Movement," in Abebe Zegeye and Siegfried Pausewang, Ethiopia in Change, pp.82-83; The Ethiopian Students Union in North America, "Repression in Ethiopia," p.4.

²⁹ Dessalegn Rahmato, "Land Policy in Ethiopia at the Crossroads," Proceedings of the Second Workshop of the Land Tenure Project, No 8, October 1994, p.13.

revolution or "a complete social transformation of...[Ethiopian] society" to eradicate the intractable problem of famine.³⁰

Faculty and students at Haile Sellassie I University (renamed Addis Ababa University in 1975) greatly influenced the economic and political ideas of the junior military officers who took power in Ethiopia. Some members of the military council, such as Captain Moges Wolde-Mikael, were students in the university when students, taxi drivers and union members rebelled against the Imperial Government.³¹ As students, they had participated in the university's famine-relief and rehabilitation activities in 1973 and in debates about the solutions to famine. Even as they undertook the first organized domestic effort to relieve famine in Wollo, in April 1974, students and faculty members viewed famine-relief operations as "meaningless unless...[every peasant] had land to plough."³² They decried the tendency of food relief to kill the incentive of peasants to produce food for themselves and

³⁰ The Ethiopian Students Union in North America, "Repression in Africa," p.8; Richard Greenfield, Ethiopia: A New Political History, pp.339-341, 398-402; Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, "A City and Its Hinterlands," p.389; Haile Sellassie I University Famine Relief Committee, "Report on Activities," July 1974, p.10.

³¹ Author's tape interview with Zegeye Asfaw, author of the Land Reform Proclamation and former Minister of Agriculture and Settlement under the PMAC, Addis Ababa, 29 May 1995.

³² University Famine Relief Committee, "Report on Activities," Haile Sellassie I University, July 1974, p.11.

worst of all to undermine national dignity and self-reliance.³³ The university activists attracted wide support for their belief that the solution to the problem of famine lay in "change encompassing all aspects of... life... which existed...[in Ethiopia]" before 1974.³⁴ That change included the transformation of the "archaic and inefficient system of local authority."³⁵

For a generation which viewed Ethiopia as an icon of African achievement, the reality of famine was a blemish whose immediate and total eradication could not be deferred. The PMAC undertook the most popular reform measures, especially land redistribution which its civilian mentors advocated. But in its zeal for change, it failed to consider how its land reform and agricultural policies might benefit peasants in the long run. As Dawit rightly observes, the fledgling administrative council acted in response to the proddings of the students and the faculty of the university.³⁶ As it struggled to survive opposition from civilian groups advocating a radical social transformation, particular policies appealed to the government if they helped to project

³³ University Famine Relief and Rehabilitation Organization, "Policy and Procedure Manual and Progress Report," Addis Ababa, October 1974, p.29.

³⁴ Haile Sellassie I University Famine Relief Committee, "Report on Activities," July 1974, p.11.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.24.

it as "the real revolutionary force" in Ethiopia.³⁷

In its efforts to preserve its power, under the banner of transforming agriculture along socialist lines, the military administration reorganized agriculture under a four-part system. It gave the highest priority and a disproportionately large share of national resources to state farms. Next in its order of priorities came the collective farms and resettlement schemes followed by the least valued portion of its agricultural system, the individual peasant producer sector.

Land Reform as a Component of the New Agrarian Policy

Land reform was the touchstone of the Ethiopian revolution.³⁸ A radical transformation of the land tenure system appealed to the military council as a crucial step towards eliminating the quasi-feudal facets of the agrarian economy and building a firm political base. Ethiopia's Land Reform Proclamation of 4 March 1975 was far more radical than its antecedents in China, the Soviet Union and Latin America.³⁹ It nationalized rural lands and granted only usufructuary privileges to their tillers.

³⁷ Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p.10.

³⁸ Siegfried Pausewang, "The Peasant Perspective," in Siegfried Pausewang et al., Ethiopia: Rural Development Options, p.213.

³⁹ Author's tape interview with Zegeye Asfaw, author of the land reform document, Addis Ababa, 29 May 1995. See also Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p.67.

The PMAC limited the amount of land that any individual peasant could possess to ten hectares. The architects of the land reform law considered ten hectares (the equivalent of 24.71 acres) as the maximum amount which individual peasants could cultivate using their traditional farm technology. Peasants were, however, freed from the burden of paying outstanding debts to their landlords, but were granted the privilege of using the oxen and farm implements of their former landlords without compensation for a period of three years.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, under the land reform law, peasants could hire the labour of their colleagues only under exceptional circumstances.⁴¹

Given the mounting civilian opposition to its legitimacy, the military council needed a radical land reform policy to project a revolutionary outlook and consolidate its power without a serious debate about its consequences.⁴² According to Marina and David Ottaway, Maj. Mengistu Haile-Mariam, first vice-chairman of the PMAC and Capt. Moges Wolde-Mikael,

⁴⁰ Ministry of Agriculture and Settlement and Institute of Development Research, "Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in Ethiopia," Addis Ababa, August 1978, p.59.

⁴¹ Although the land reform proclamation abolished tenancy, sale, lease or mortgage of land, these practices continued in many parts of Ethiopia. See Dessalegn Rahmato, "Cooperatives, State Farms and Smallholder Production," in Siegfried Pausewang et al., Ethiopia: Rural Development Options, p.100.

⁴² Author's tape interview with Zegeye Asfaw, Addis Ababa, 29 May 1995. See also John Markakis and Nega Ayele, Class and Revolution in Ethiopia, p.107; Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.26.

chairman of the economic subcommittee, shaped the radical content of the land reform proclamation. They used it to sustain the support they enjoyed among junior Oromo officers from southern Ethiopia, where tenancy and exploitation of peasants by rich landlords had long been sources of discontent.⁴³ But there were other strategic motives. Outright nationalization of land limited the ability of soldiers, officers and local administrators who owned large tracts of land to resist the land reform measure. Besides weakening the political and economic power that landlords enjoyed under the Imperial regime, the land reform proclamation laid the foundation for the type of economy that the PMAC wanted to build.⁴⁴ By limiting land holdings to ten hectares, an area too small for successful commercial farming, the PMAC and the authors of the land proclamation created an incentive for peasants to join state farms or collective farms.

Land Reform and Collective Agriculture as Multi-Purpose Policies.

The PMAC's introduction of land reform, formation of peasant associations and collectivization policies were meant

⁴³ Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p.67.

⁴⁴ Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, Ministry of Agriculture Planning and Programming Department, "General Agricultural Survey: Preliminary Report 1983-1984," Vol. 1, Ministry of Agriculture, Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa, October 1984, p.1.

to address a broad array of problems. They included problems of local government, land fragmentation and national unity. These problems preceded the PMAC, but in attempting to address them, the PMAC also took the opportunity to advance its own political interests. By next giving peasants the power to implement the land reform measure themselves, the PMAC did not intend to democratize Ethiopian society, but to enlist the support of peasants to its cause. The PMAC authorized peasants to form peasant associations (PA) for each 800 hectares or more of land and limit their membership to people who had no land, were tenant peasants, agricultural labourers or land owners with less than 10 hectares of land at the time of the land reform measure. That had significant implications. Placing authority in the hands of poor peasants, rather than the old landed aristocracy, enabled the military council to restructure local government and stifle resistance to its agricultural policies from landed aristocrats. After the Land Reform proclamation, over 20,000 Peasant Associations were established to facilitate the transition from individual peasant agriculture into collective farming.⁴⁵ The Government expected every peasant association to establish and operate collective farms. To promote that policy, in chapters of its 14 December 1975 proclamation, the military council authorized the peasant associations to establish their own courts to

⁴⁵ Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, p.268.

settle disputes arising from the new agricultural policy.⁴⁶

The land reform proclamation had mixed results. By improving access to land holding, it removed a major obstacle to the production and accumulation of food by many peasants. However, the reform measure neither eradicated famine nor eliminated the vulnerability of Ethiopia's rural poor to acute food losses. Food production reportedly increased by 2.5 percent in 1976 as a result of the "revolutionary zeal" which peasants showed by cultivating more land.⁴⁷ But that zeal did not translate into marketable surpluses or enable Ethiopia to overcome dependence on international food donations, as we shall observe in chapters seven and eight.

The PMAC's land reform measure led to the replacement of the Imperial government's local administrative institutions with the new government's peasant associations and produced some very positive results. Peasant associations built schools and clinics and offered a forum for the discussion of rural economic problems. And they pursued their literacy drives with such distinction that they earned for the country, in 1982,

⁴⁶ Ministry of Agriculture and Settlement, Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, "Measures for Rural Transformation," Addis Ababa, February 1978, p. 9. See also Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, pp. 220-223.

⁴⁷ Alemaya Lirensso, "Food Aid and its Impact in Ethiopian Agriculture," Institute of Development Research, Addis Ababa University, Research Report No. 26, November 1986, p.12.

UNESCO's special literacy award.⁴⁸

Theoretically, the land reform proclamation should have ended feudalism and promoted a new freedom.⁴⁹ However, while it eliminated one form of oppression, it replaced it with another. Land reform in Revolutionary Ethiopia was intended to satisfy a popular demand by breaking the power and privileges of the aristocracy. Within the pre-1974 discourse on land reform, it was supposed to empower peasants and help release their energies. However, the post-1974 land reform policy ended up creating new landlords in the form of peasant association officers who administered land--the property of the state--on behalf of the Revolutionary Government, which became a new emperor. Peasants who received land and held it at the pleasure of peasant associations and the state were no less in bondage, in the era of "freedom and prosperity," than they had been under the Imperial semi-feudal agrarian system.⁵⁰ The relationship between peasants and the Ethiopian state was a lingering legacy which the revolution altered in name, but not in spirit.

⁴⁸ The military government received praise for raising the literacy rate in Ethiopia from 9 percent in 1974 to 37 percent by 1982. See Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.27.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.268.

⁵⁰ Author's tape interviews with peasants at Mertuley Maryam, East Gojjam, 5 October 1995 and with elder peasants at Mersa, Habru woreda, North Wollo Administrative Zone, 12 October 1995. See also Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.267.

Constant redivision of land by the peasant associations and the conditioning of access to land on loyalty to the Government promoted another type of land insecurity. The fragmentation of land which took place after 1975 was worse than before and created disincentives to increased food production as powerful as those for which the architects of the revolution had indicted the Imperial Government and executed some of its officials.⁵¹ As in the Imperial period, when aristocrats owned large tracts of land, many of the people who became owners of the best tracts of land in the Revolutionary era were not active farmers; in the new era they were revolutionary zealots.⁵²

Land reform laid the structural basis for the most important agricultural policies of the military administration. The PMAC saw the collectivization of agriculture as the engine of "socialist" rural development. In theory, any three peasants who lived in the same area could form a producer cooperative or cooperate to produce food. A producer cooperative or collective farm became eligible for registration and state support when it had a minimum of 30 members.⁵³ Members of registered collective farms had access

⁵¹ Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, p.270.

⁵² Author's tape interviews with Melesa Fetena (53), Aytanau Ijiku (55) Mulate Teshome (53), at Mertuley Maryam, East Gojjam, 5 October 1995 and with elder peasants at Kutaber, North Wollo Administrative Zone, 19 October 1995.

⁵³ Dessalegn Rahmato, "Cooperatives, State Farms and Smallholder Production," p.102.

to credit from the banks and could, if they wished, move from their individual homesteads to build their own centralized villages elsewhere.⁵⁴ The Revolutionary Government perceived the pool of collective resources as a means of accelerating large-scale food production in areas where centuries of small-scale individual agriculture had failed to equip peasants with the capacity to deal with crop failure.

To nudge individual peasants into collective forms of production, the PMAC decreed the offer of periodic free labour to cooperatives by individual peasants who lived closer to them.⁵⁵ Yet these privileges did not endear collective agriculture to many unaffiliated peasants. By 1986, only 225 out of a total of 2,323 collective farms had attained the minimum membership to obtain registration. That low rate of participation signified the difficulties that the state and its peasant associations faced in urging peasants to set up full-fledged collective farms.⁵⁶

The compulsory socialization of rural life had consequences for individual peasant production and national political stability.⁵⁷ Political meetings and unpaid labour on

⁵⁴ Solomon Bellette, "Ethiopia's Agricultural Production Strategies: An Overview," in Proceedings of the National Workshop on Food Strategies for Ethiopia Held at Alemaya University of Agriculture, Ethiopia, 8-12 December 1986, p.81.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.102.

⁵⁷ Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, pp.271-272.

nearby collective farms reduced time in the fields. In Dembecha district, in Gojjam administrative region, the recruiting of peasants for military service at planting time reduced the number of cultivated plots.⁵⁸ Eviction from lands allocated by peasant associations, prosecution and executions by peasant tribunals, conscription into the peasant militia and resettlement in a distant location became the strategies which some leaders of peasant associations used to suppress peasant resistance to collectivization and regimentation. Such excesses demoralised many peasants and made them ready supporters of anti-Government movements.⁵⁹

Resolving the lingering problem of land fragmentation underpinned the PMAC's collectivization policies.⁶⁰ But the government and its student revolutionaries failed to distinguish between intended and unintended fragmentation of land in Ethiopia's peasant economy. Inheritance systems, environmental conditions, land scarcity and population pressure led many peasants in Ethiopia, especially in the north, to deliberately cultivate many parcels of land. Land in different locations with different patterns of drainage, wind,

⁵⁸ Ethiopian Grain Board, "Price Control and Production Survey September-October 1976," *Restricted*, File 3/19 Ministry of Natural Resources Development and Environmental Protection Archives, Addis Ababa, pp.13-14.

⁵⁹ Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, *Red Tears*, pp.269, 272.

⁶⁰ Dessalegn Rahmato, "Land Policy in Ethiopia at the Crossroads," Proceedings of the Second Workshop of the Land Tenure Project, No 8, October 1994, p.10.

and pest and disease infestations enabled peasants to exploit a variety of ecological micro-zones and crops. By this method, many Ethiopian peasants had mastered their environment and minimized the risk of total crop failure.⁶¹

Students who helped to implement the land reform program in 1975 were carried away by their enthusiasm for collective agriculture and Marxist philosophy. Wielding Mao's Little Red Book, they lectured peasants on class struggle and the importance of collective farms to the amazement of peasants whose leaders kept inquiring about oxen and fertilizer to produce food.⁶²

The students had a ready explanation for peasant disinterest in collectivization. They interpreted their reactions as confirming "the Fanonian thesis that peasants are incapable of sustained, spontaneous organization" and reiterated "the Leninist thesis that leadership must be brought to the peasantry because they can only be organized from outside their social structure."⁶³ Despite its conceptual attractiveness, little empirical evidence existed to suggest that the collective mode of production was more efficient than individual peasant agriculture in Ethiopia.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p.74.

⁶³ Ibid., pp.74-75.

The Marxist ideas of some members of the military council and their civilian mentors were left-wing pretences that masked political pragmatism. Marina and David Ottaway have argued that any characterization of the policies of the military government as genuinely inspired by the Soviet experiment or of its civilian opponents as disciples of Mao stretches the facts.⁶⁴ Marxism-Leninism provided a new social myth to legitimate control of peasants after the fall of the Solomonic dynasty of Emperor Haile Sellassie, and to challenge the authority of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

In foreign affairs, Marxism-Leninism enabled the government to claim ideological affinity with a superpower, the Soviet Union, and forge a beneficial relationship in which the major interest of the Revolutionary Government was Soviet military equipment rather than the transformation of Ethiopia into a communist country.⁶⁵ This strategy only served to reinforce pre-1974 Ethiopian domestic and foreign policies which were "dominated by the search for sources of military supplies to satisfy demands for a military establishment."⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p.101. See also Edmund Keller, Revolutionary Ethiopia, p.198.

⁶⁵ Author's tape interview with Tesfaye Mekasha, former-vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in the Imperial Government, Addis Ababa, 30 July 1995. Tesfaye Mekasha served as an official in the MFA for a short period during the military regime.

⁶⁶ See Amare Tekle, "Continuity and Change in Ethiopian Politics," in Marina Ottaway, ed., The Political Economy of Ethiopia, p.36.

In post-1974 domestic politics, shared ideological objectives had the virtue for the military rulers of making left-wing civilian opponents illegitimate. Marxism-Leninism also promoted class explanations of social relations to counteract the invocation of ethnic identities as frameworks for organizing post-Imperial Ethiopia. In these circumstances, true Marxists and "progressives" were authorized by their loyalty to the Government and the state to liquidate "the enemies of the revolution" or, as Dawit Wolde Giorgis states, to build the Ethiopian revolution "on the graves of the reactionaries."⁶⁷

Land Reform and the State as a Producer

The military council was no different from the Imperial Government in its lack of confidence in individual peasant agriculture as a mode of food production.⁶⁸ The first draft of the land reform proclamation had exempted the large and functioning commercial farms, which covered an area of 131,000 hectares by 1975, from nationalization. That exemption arose from admission by the experts that the government would not be able to successfully manage them. The military government, probably on the advice of its radical civilian mentors,

⁶⁷ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.22. See also Ministry of Agriculture and Settlement, Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, "Measures for Rural Transformation," Addis Ababa, February 1978, p. 10.

⁶⁸ Dessalegn Rahmato, "Cooperatives, State Farms and Smallholder Production," p.103.

rejected those recommendations and nationalized all commercial farms in 1976.⁶⁹ It established the State Farms Development Authority (later the Ministry of State Farms Development) in May 1977 to compete with individual peasants for state resources to support food production.⁷⁰

The transformation of commercial farms into state-farms was motivated by practical considerations, but rationalized in Marxist terms. Following in the footsteps of the Imperial Government, the Revolutionary Government evicted many peasants from their lands in Arsi, Bale, and Gojjam to make way for the state-managed mechanized farms, which by 1977 covered an area of 55,000 hectares.⁷¹ State food production served as a safeguard against adverse peasant reactions to state policy, particularly the failure or reluctance of individual peasants and collective farmers to supply the Government with enough food to keep the campuses, barracks and urban areas quiet.⁷²

⁶⁹ Solomon Bellette, "Ethiopia's Agricultural Production Strategies: An Overview," in Proceedings of the National Workshop on Food Strategies for Ethiopia Held at Alemaya University of Agriculture, Ethiopia, 8-12 December 1986, pp.81-82.

⁷⁰ Dessalegn Rahmato, "Cooperatives, State Farms and Smallholder Production," p.103.

⁷¹ Dessalegn Rahmato, "Cooperatives, State Farms and Smallholder Production," p.106. See also World Bank, "Ethiopian Agriculture: A Strategy for Growth," Confidential Report No. 65.2 ET, Sector Review Vol.1, 25 March 1987, Ministry of Agriculture Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa, p.xvi.

⁷² See Mulatu Wubneh, "Development Strategy and the Growth of the Ethiopian Economy: A Comparative Analysis of the Pre

Despite absorbing 43 percent of state expenditures for agriculture and more than 80 percent of improved seed supply, farm equipment and bank loans, the state farms, furnished only 6 percent of national food output.⁷³ Not even the higher prices that the Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC) paid for crops from the state farms as compared with what it paid to individual peasants, increased the output of the state farms to any significant degree.⁷⁴ Their major role was to provide a reliable source of food for state procurement agencies such as the AMC.⁷⁵

The military government blamed the poor output of the state farms on politically-motivated saboteurs. Dawit Wolde Giorgis states that it jailed or executed managers of state farms when it concluded that they had deliberately failed to motivate their workers to increase production. These executions took place despite the failure of the government to obtain spare parts for the farm machinery that it imported from many countries and in spite of repeated suggestions by

and Post Revolutionary Period," in Marina Ottaway, ed., The Political Economy of Ethiopia, p.206.

⁷³ Ministry of Agriculture, Planning and Programming Department, People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, "Food Crop Development Information," Addis Ababa, July 1978, pp.16. See also World Bank, "Ethiopian Agriculture: A Strategy for Growth," Confidential Report No. 65.2 ET, Sector Review Vol.1, 25 March 1987, Ministry of Agriculture Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa, p.xv.

⁷⁴ Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, p.273.

⁷⁵ Dessalegn Rahmato, "Cooperatives, State Farms and Smallholder Production," p.103.

key planners that the state farms be converted into small-size demonstration farms.⁷⁶

The TPLF redistributed land in the areas it controlled and regimented peasants around the same socialist principles as the government it opposed. The TPLF intimidated, incarcerated and executed dissenters within its ranks and those it arbitrarily defined as "ideological deviants."⁷⁷ The EPLF was equally Marxist-Leninist in its agricultural policies. It advocated the nationalization of land and the creation of state farms and urged peasants within its domain to organize cooperative farms as part of their obligation to maintain "a revolutionary outlook."⁷⁸ Nevertheless, by June of 1977, the atrocities of the Government and relations between it and the left-wing opposition groups had deteriorated to the point that the regime's agricultural policies, which opposition groups had endorsed, became rallying cries for opponents of the Government.

During the White and Red Terror campaigns of February

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.103. See also Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, p.274.

⁷⁷ See Gebru Tareke, "Continuity and Discontinuity in Peasant Mobilization: The Cases of Bale and Tigray," in Marina Ottaway, ed., The Political Economy of Ethiopia, p.149, and Barbara Hendrie, "Relief Aid Behind the Lines: The Cross Border Operation in Tigray," in Joanna Macrae and Anthony Zwi, War and Hunger: Rethinking International Responses to Complex Emergencies (London: Zed Books, 1994), p.127.

⁷⁸ See "The National Democratic Programme of the EPLF," in Basil Davidson, Lionel Cliffe and Bereket Habte Sellassie, Behind the War in Eritrea (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1980), pp.143-144.

1977, the Government succeeded in establishing functioning collective farms only in areas where peasants did not violently resist the policy or where opposition groups did not incite peasants to violently rebel against them.⁷⁹ When it suited it, the Government armed and mobilized peasants who supported it against those who supported the liberation fronts.⁸⁰ In June 1977, the military government ordered officials of peasant associations to recruit 300,000 peasants into a "people's militia" to terrorize "enemies of the revolution and the Motherland."⁸¹ It was in this volatile atmosphere of terror, mutual annihilation and peasant resentment against state socialist agriculture that Somalia invaded Ethiopia on 23 July 1977.

The Republic of Somalia, Ethiopia's eastern neighbour, had since 1960 sought to annex the Ogaden region in southeastern Ethiopia, in accordance with its determination to reunite all Somali lands under Ethiopia's control.⁸² By December 1977, Somali soldiers controlled about one-third of

⁷⁹ Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p.78.

⁸⁰ Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, p.269.

⁸¹ Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, Ministry of Agriculture and Settlement, "Ethiopia: Measures for Rural Transformation," February 1978, Ministry of Agriculture Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa, p.10.

⁸² For a discussion of Ethiopia-Somalia relations in the 1950s and 1960s see Louis FitzGibbon, The Betrayal of the Somalis (London: Rex Collings, 1982), pp.43-48, and Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, The Ethiopian Revolution, pp. 76, 199-201.

Ethiopian territory, leaving the military government in a more desperate and precarious position than any of its domestic opponents. At the time the Somalis struck, the PMAC had liquidated the cream of Ethiopia's soldiers and the lethal struggle between it and its civilian opponents had weakened national patriotism and bred mutual distrust. It was partly the consequences of revolutionary politics and agricultural policy that made it imperative for the military administration to desperately seek Cuban, and later Soviet assistance, to repel the Somali invasion.⁸³

Invasion, Civil War and Agriculture, 1977-1979

The Somali invasion created another stress on politics and agricultural policy in Ethiopia. It created an opportunity for domestic opposition groups to expand their political bases. In the course of the invasion, the WSLF attacked key areas in the Ogaden and Hararghe, in southeastern Ethiopia. The EPLF took advantage of the invasion to occupy most of Eritrea leaving the Government with only tenuous control over Asmara and the port cities of Massawa and Assab.⁸⁴ Similarly, the TPLF increased its control over Tigray. The Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement (EPDM) kept parts of Gondar, in

⁸³ Author's tape interview with Tesfaye Mekasha, former-vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in the Imperial Government, Addis Ababa, 30 July 1995.

⁸⁴ Edmund J. Keller, "Constitutionalism and the National Question in Africa: The Case of Eritrea," in Marina Ottaway, ed., The Political Economy of Ethiopia, p.105.

northeastern Ethiopia under its control while the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) consolidated its authority over western Wollega.⁸⁵ As winning the war against Somalia and domestic insurgent groups took precedence over winning the war over famine, the military government ordered the peasant associations to recruit more peasants for military service with the predictable negative effects on the rural food supply.⁸⁶

The Somali-Ethiopian war also disrupted resettlement farms in the sparsely populated, but fertile highland plains of Bale, Sidamo and Hararghe, in southeastern Ethiopia, which the Government established in 1975. It displaced many people in the region whose resettlement the United States assisted, as we shall see in chapter six.⁸⁷ Continuing insurgent activities by the EPLF in Eritrea and the TPLF in Tigray also displaced many farmers in northern Ethiopia. Two million people, predominantly women and children, were reportedly affected. The Government earmarked four thousand square miles of land on the Shenka and Sinana plains and along the Delo-Gassera-Demble area, in northeastern Ethiopia, for the resettlement of the displaced peasants under the supervision

⁸⁵ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, pp.308-310.

⁸⁶ Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p.182.

⁸⁷ Shimelis Adugna, Commissioner of the RRC, to Mr. Arthur T. Tienken, Charge d'Affaires of U.S. Embassy, Addis Ababa, 11 October 1977, RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/26 USA AID, Vol.1.

of the RRC and the Ministry of Agriculture.⁸⁸

Ethiopia's victory in the war with Somalia in March 1978 presented an opportunity for the Revolutionary Government to consolidate itself and hardened the political attitudes of its opponents.⁸⁹ Imbued with a new sense of confidence, Lt. Col. Mengistu Haile-Mariam saw himself as the only person capable of assuring Ethiopian Unity.⁹⁰ State agricultural policy more and more reflected the government's struggle to survive while anti-government groups such as the EPLF, TPLF and OLF mastered the art of using peasant grievances against state agricultural policies as the foci of opposition to the Government.

Resettlement as a Collective Food Production Technique, -1975-1980

Like collective peasant agriculture and the state farms, the resettlement of peasants constituted a crucial component of the military government's long-term agricultural development plans. Resettlement had formed part of the Imperial Government's efforts to modernize agriculture. Under the First Five Year Development Plan (1957-1961), the IEG

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, pp.41, 48.

⁹⁰ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, pp.49, 108; Merahehiwot Gebremariam, "Ethio-U.S. Relations," Ethioscope, Vol.1, No.2 (January 1995): 15; author's tape interviews with Tesfaye Mekasha, former vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Imperial Government, Addis Ababa, 30 July 1995 and with Taye Gurmu, former Deputy Commissioner of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, Addis Ababa, 31 October 1995.

settled people on "unused lands" as a means of expanding food production.⁹¹ The pre-1974 resettlement programs were carefully managed by the Awash Valley Authority, and the ministries of Land Reform and Administration, Agriculture, and National Community Development. They were voluntary and involved moving peasants only a short distance from where they lived.⁹² The resettles included soldiers who had distinguished themselves in the Imperial service, the urban unemployed, the famine-affected and people evicted from lands utilized for development projects.

In the Revolutionary period, the PMAC initially used resettlement as a means of dispersing the residents of relief shelters which were constructed in 1972 and 1973. It created the Settlement Authority in 1976 to accomplish that objective and also to resettle poor peasants, the urban unemployed and nomads between the ages of 18 and 45 who were "willing to engage in agriculture" on uncultivated and underutilized lands.⁹³ These initial resettlement drives provided

⁹¹ Tegegne Teka, "The Evolution of Settlement/Resettlement Organization in Ethiopia," Proceedings of the Workshop on Famine Experience and Resettlement in Ethiopia 29-30 December 1988, Institute of Development Research Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa University, p.82.

⁹² See Arian P. Wood, "Spontaneous Agricultural Resettlement in Ethiopia, 1950-1974," RRC Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa, File No. A 6.91.

⁹³ See Tegegne Teka, "The Evolution of Settlement/Resettlement Organization in Ethiopia," Proceedings of the Workshop on Famine Experience and Resettlement in Ethiopia 29-30 December 1988, Institute of Development Research Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa University, p.88-

opportunities to lower urban unemployment, to put more land under food production and to introduce settled agriculture into the life of many nomads.⁹⁴ The Settlement Authority (SA) resettled 22,221 families between February 1975 and June 1978 while the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) resettled 110,090 people including 30,000 nomads along the banks of the Wabi Shebelle river in southeastern Ethiopia by December 1979.⁹⁵

The Government undertook these resettlement programmes despite the fact that it lacked the resources to make them succeed. Nevertheless, since the eradication of famine and the restoration of Ethiopia's dignity attracted wide public support, the government, and those who volunteered to resettle, saw resettlement as "better than languishing in

89. See also Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, "Drought: RRC Activities and International Donors," RRC Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa, p.3; and Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, "Settlement Policy," July 1981, RRC Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa, p.1.

⁹⁴ Settlement Authority, Public Relations, Information and Education Department, "Settlement Review," February 1979, RRC Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa, p.1. See also RRC, "Assistance to the Planning and Implementation of Large Scale Settlement for Rural Development," Project Brief ETH/80/015, January 1983, RRC Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa, p.1.

⁹⁵ Shimelis Adugna, Commissioner of the RRC, to the International Sales Manager, Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, Akron, Ohio, USA, 25 March 1977, RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/26 USA AID, Vol.1; Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, p.286.

relief camps or starving... [at] home...."⁹⁶ The financial costs of resettling people, the increasing armed opposition to the government and the outrage of the resettles over collectivization in the resettlements forced the government to decelerate the program in 1979.⁹⁷

By the end of 1979, it had become clear that external invasion and domestic conflict, as well as socialist agricultural policies, had created conditions which were undermining peasant incentive to produce and store food. Ironically, the Mengistu government reported a 4.8 percent growth in national food production in 1979, attributing that rate of growth to good weather, recovery from earlier droughts and positive peasant responses to land reform and state policy.⁹⁸ Given the low morale that collective agriculture, political meetings and militia duties created in peasants, and the continuing dependence of Ethiopia on international food aid between 1975 and 1977, the increase in production would

⁹⁶ RRC, "Interim Report: Assistance to Settlement," September 1980, RRC Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa, p.24. See also Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA), "Minutes of the 139th General Meeting," 4 December 1978, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa.

⁹⁷ Dawit, Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, p.287. See also Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, "Settlement Policy," July 1981, RRC Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa, p.1.

⁹⁸ World Bank, "Ethiopian Agriculture: A Strategy for Growth," Confidential Report No. 65.2 ET, Sector Review Vol.1, 25 March 1987, Ministry of Agriculture Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa, p.5.

seem to have been "a statistical and not a production feat."⁹⁹ Figures on production were not only hard to obtain in the revolutionary period, they were often manipulated to project the success of revolutionary agricultural policies and revive public confidence in the Government.¹⁰⁰

It is the author's contention that it was what the Revolutionary Government thought socialist agriculture might accomplish for it, in its domestic politics, more than in its foreign relations, that made collective farming attractive to the government despite its negative impact on peasants. Socializing agriculture enabled the Government to extract food from peasants and to control the production and marketing of food in its struggle with domestic rivals.

Food Pricing, Marketing and the Preservation of State and Party

When the land reform proclamation of 1975 outlawed the delivery of large quantities of food to landlords in the cities, peasants increased their own consumption of food. They also withheld food from the markets which drove up food prices and threatened to create a crisis.¹⁰¹ The government

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.24.

¹⁰¹ Mulatu Wubneh, "Development Strategy and the Growth of the Economy: A Comparative Analysis of the Pre and Post Revolutionary Period," in Marina Ottaway, ed., The Political Economy of Ethiopia, p.206.

established the Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC) in 1976 to address the problem. The AMC procured food from peasants for sale in urban areas, especially Addis Ababa.

To maintain adequate reserves of food, the state now required peasants to fill quotas for food deliveries to the AMC through their peasant associations and to sell part of their crops to the state. Private traders could participate in the food trade as long as they sold half of the food they purchased to the AMC at prices determined by the government.¹⁰² Besides selling their food at fixed prices to the AMC, peasants were required to sell a fixed quota of food to their peasant associations at a very low price. By intervening in the pricing and marketing of foodstuffs and also controlling the movement of food across districts, the military government hoped to control the political impact of food shortages and to avoid the fate of the Imperial Government.

¹⁰² Ministry of Agriculture, Planning and Programming Department, "Food Crop Development Information," Addis Ababa, July 1978, pp.21-22.

Table 2.--Food Pricing and Marketing in Revolutionary Ethiopia

Crop	Cost of Production	AMC Price	Difference
Wheat.....	24.94 Birr	31.00 Birr	6.06 Birr
Barley.....	25.72 "	27.00 "	1.28 "
Teff.....	28.96 "	36.00 "	7.04 "
Maize.....	16.04 "	17.00 "	0.96 "
Sorghum.....	16.36 "	20.00 "	3.64 "
Horse Bean..	39.86 "	25.00 "	-14.86 "
Field Pea...	34.50 "	34.00 "	0.50 "

Source: Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, "Ethiopia's Food Security: Problems and Prospects," Paper Presented at the National Workshop on Food Strategies for Ethiopia, Alemaya, December 1986, pp.15-16.

The Ethiopian Government may not have intended to strip peasants almost bare of food and money, but its crop marketing policies and food quota impositions resulted in the impoverishment of peasants. Also the manner in which state agents implemented the food quota regulations, pushed many people in the rural areas to the brink of destitution before the vagaries of nature accelerated their descent into death from starvation. Officials of peasant associations tied the access of peasants to basic necessities such as soap, sugar and blankets to the complete fulfilment of their grain delivery quotas to the AMC. Those who could not comply or refused to fulfil that obligation faced a variety of penalties. Peasant leaders in Wollo, for instance, deliberately interpreted inability to deliver food to the AMC as indicating either destitution, which made one a candidate

for resettlement, or dissidence, which made one a counter-revolutionary.¹⁰³

Though not intended to enrich rural officials at the expense of poor peasants, state policies provided some leaders of peasant associations with the opportunity to improve their economic positions. Policies such as resettlement provided the instrument with which despotic officials of peasant associations coerced poor peasants to give food, or leave their farms and families to shed their blood as soldiers in a civil war in which they had no stake. Some officials of peasant associations appropriated the farms and cattle of those they recommended for resettlement or military service.

As in the Imperial period, low land fertility, poor income levels and bad weather did not absolve peasants from the payment of taxes to the state.¹⁰⁴ Paulos Milkias has listed fourteen types of tax which peasants paid. They included a 20 *Birr* land use fee, a 5 *Birr* All Ethiopian Peasant Association fee, a 5 *Birr* road building fee, a 10 *Birr* collective farming fee, a 5 *Birr* district court house building fee and a 1 *Birr*

¹⁰³ Author's tape interview with 10 peasants (minimal age 22 and maximum 72) at Yeduha, Shebel Bernta woreda, Gojjam, 4 October 1994 and also with 12 peasants (average age 45) at Wegel Tena, Delanta woreda, North Wollo Administrative Zone, 14 October 1995. The groups included former leaders and members of their peasant associations.

¹⁰⁴ Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, "Ethiopia's Food Security: Problems and Prospects," Paper Presented at the National Workshop on Food Strategies for Ethiopia, Alemaya, December 1986, p.13.

"Call of the Motherland" fee, among others.¹⁰⁵ These taxes and "voluntary" public services were no different in effect from the old feudal duties that peasants performed for their landlords during the Imperial period.¹⁰⁶ The peasant associations rigorously collected the state's taxes as the Government became more desperate for revenue and food in its struggle to survive mounting domestic opposition.¹⁰⁷

The behaviour of the state and its rural agents made many peasants look back to the Imperial period with profound nostalgia. As one peasant elder put it, "during the Haile Sellassie period we knew how much tax to pay and determined the prices of our food."¹⁰⁸ The new taxes and the harsh implementation of the state's grain quota directives generated so much rancour that many peasants supported anti-government movements without regard for their ethnic composition or ideological perspectives. Gojjam, Gondar, North Shoa and Wollo became the centres of peasant antipathy toward the military regime. The regions provided a reservoir of discontent which the liberation fronts exploited to sustain war against the

¹⁰⁵ Paulos Milkias, "An Appraisal of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution," Part III, Ethiopian Review, (November 1993): 23.

¹⁰⁶ Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, p.271.

¹⁰⁷ Mengistu Haile-Mariam, "May Day Address," 1 May 1983 (Unofficial Translation at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies Library, Addis Ababa University), p. 23.

¹⁰⁸ Author's tape interview with a group of 7 peasants at Mertuley Maryam, Gojjam Administrative Region, 5 October 1995.

Mengistu government. In fact, there were peasants who fought at one time on the side of the Government against anti-Government groups and later joined more than one insurgent group in fighting against the Government.¹⁰⁹

State restrictions on the movement of grain across districts did as much damage to the human spirit as the AMC's quota system and the oppressive methods of some peasant association leaders. When grain producers could not easily sell their food where they wanted, the local markets of surplus-producing regions such as Arsi and Gojjam overflowed with food while people starved in other parts of the country.¹¹⁰ Dawit Wolde Giorgis cites the dramatic protest of a woman trader. She committed suicide in March 1984 after policemen manning a grain check-point outside Addis Ababa prevented her from bringing 15 kilograms of teff she had bought from peasants into the city.¹¹¹ Abuses of power by police and other state agents who implemented the misguided policies of the state led to many such incidents. They only served to fuel popular disgust for the Mengistu Government's path of development and to illustrate the failure of the new government to reform the behaviour of the state.

¹⁰⁹ Author's tape interviews with a group of 7 peasants at Mertuley Maryam, Gojjam Administrative Region, 5 October 1995 and with 12 peasants at Wegel Tena, Delanta woreda, North Wollo Administrative Zone, 14 October 1995.

¹¹⁰ Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, p.270.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.276.

By the beginning of 1980, war and misguided state agricultural policies had induced famine and aggravated it in many parts of the country, as we shall see in chapter seven. To absolve itself of blame, and avoid calls for the prosecution of its own officials, in accordance with its penal code of November 1974, the military government constructed its own myth of prosperity based on its radical land reform measures. In 1982, top officials of the PMAC celebrated the land reform proclamation as a victory for emancipating peasants from centuries of serfdom and granting them economic freedom.¹¹² Like the Imperial Government, it looked elsewhere for the causes of its failure to eradicate famine.

The Revolutionary Government attributed its inability to make the "momentous leap forward" in agriculture on separatist "counter-revolutionaries" and "bandits" who, according to Mengistu, "deprived peasants of their ability to farm and feed themselves."¹¹³ This explanation was only partially true, but it provided the Government with the opportunity, in the 1980s, to shift the construction of its legitimacy from the total elimination of famine to the task of keeping Ethiopia

¹¹² See "Report Delivered by Comrade Legesse Asfaw, Member of the Standing Committee of the PMAC and Executive Committee of COPWE and Chairman of the Supreme Central Committee of AETU and AEPA on the Third Congress of the All Ethiopian Peasants Association," Addis Ababa, 20 July 1982, p.3.

¹¹³ Mengistu Haile-Mariam, "May Day Address....," 1 May 1984, p.16. See also Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, "Interview with Ethiopia's Head of State....," 27 February 1985, World Food Programme Archives, Addis Ababa, Incoming Cables, April-July, 1985.

together.¹¹⁴ By continuing their armed struggle with the government around the right of ethnic groups to secede from Ethiopia, the TPLF, EPLF, and other groups handed the military government a rallying point to justify its dictatorship. The Government explained its extraction of food from peasants and its control of food production and marketing as necessary to uphold national unity.¹¹⁵ The pricing and marketing policies of the government, its restrictions on the movement of food across districts and regions, the imposition of food delivery quotas and the harsh enforcement of that policy by the peasant associations exacerbated the plight of many poor peasants.

By December 1980, about 23,000 Peasant Associations (PA's) had been formed with about 7 million members.¹¹⁶ The government sought to "guide" and "organize" them as its domestic political allies.¹¹⁷ After 12 September 1984, when the government shed its provisional status and formed the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE), during the celebration of the tenth

¹¹⁴ See Mengistu Haile-Mariam, "May Day Address," 1 May 1983 (Unofficial Translation located at Institute of Ethiopian Studies Library), p. 23.

¹¹⁵ Author's tape interview with Tesfaye Mekasha, former-vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in the Imperial Government, Addis Ababa, 30 July 1995.

¹¹⁶ RRC, "National Food Security Reserve Project," December 1980, RRC Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa, p.17

¹¹⁷ See "Report Delivered by Comrade Legesse Asfaw, Member of the Standing Committee of the PMAC and Executive Committee of COPWE and Chairman of the Supreme Central Committee of AETU and AEPA on the Third Congress of the All Ethiopian Peasants Association," Addis Ababa, 20 July 1982, p.3.

anniversary of the revolution, the PA's came under the control of the All Ethiopian Peasants Association (AEPA). The AEPA ensured that the activities of the PA's conformed with the interests of the WPE, especially the attainment of the greater goal of defeating anti-Government groups. The key activities of the PA's in the fulfilment of this goal included facilitating military recruitment, aiding resettlement and supporting government food requisitions.¹¹⁸

Party cadres and peasant association chairmen vigorously competed to earn state medals and Mengistu's praise for creating the largest number of collective farms in their districts.¹¹⁹ Dawit Wolde Giorgis has argued that Mengistu and Sgt. Legesse Asfaw, coordinator of AEPA, directly issued instructions to Peasant Associations and party officials to force peasants to create or join collective farms. In this regard, PA officials used coercive measures against their fellow peasants in their striving to appease party and president. Mengistu personally endorsed these methods, including the execution of peasants who resisted collectivization and resettlement.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ See Siegfried Pausewang, "The Peasant Perspective," p.214.

¹¹⁹ Author's interview with Zegeye Asfaw, Addis Ababa, 29 May 1995. See also Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, p.271.

¹²⁰ Author's tape interview with Zegeye Asfaw, Addis Ababa, 29 May 1995. See also Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, p.272.

Resettlement Intensified, 1984-1986

In 1984, the military government announced an ambitious ten-year development plan which emphasized socialist agriculture as its focus.¹²¹ However, the plan did not abolish the wasteful state farms, nor did it reduce state enthusiasm for collectivization, which many peasants resented, but succumbed to out of fear. State and collective farms were to receive top priority in the allocation of fertilizer and the provision of extension services. The government planned to organize more than half of Ethiopia's cultivable land into collective farms by 1994 and to revive resettlement and encourage villagization.¹²² It hoped to resettle 115,000 people at the rate of 11,000 per year under the ten year development plan.¹²³

As we have already noted, lack of funds, civil war and peasant protests against collective food production on resettlement farms had caused the government to slow the pace of resettlement as a component of its agricultural policy in 1979. In mid-1983, the RRC made a proposal to the Government

¹²¹ Ministry of Agriculture, Planning and Programming Department, People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, July 1988, Institute of Development Research Centre, Addis Ababa, p.5.

¹²² Mulatu Wubneh, "Development Strategy and the Growth of the Ethiopian Economy: A Comparative Analysis of the Pre and Post Revolutionary Period," in Marina Ottaway, ed., The Political Economy of Ethiopia, p.203.

¹²³ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, "The Power of Decision-Making in-Post-Revolution Ethiopia," in Marina Ottaway, ed., The Political Economy of Ethiopia, p.64.

to revive the resettlement program, as starvation intensified in the midst of war. The RRC proposal emphasized voluntary resettlement and private ownership of land in the settlements. It did not initially appeal to the Government, but its attitude changed in October 1984 when, according to Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Mengistu instructed the RRC to move 1.5 million people from Tigray and Wollo into southwestern Ethiopia within nine months.¹²⁴ Dawit has argued that "world reaction" to the government's lavish celebration of the tenth anniversary of its rule in September 1984, while people starved to death in Ethiopia, caused Mengistu to prioritize resettlement in the summer of 1984.¹²⁵

Mengistu's renewed interest in resettlement arose from a number of considerations in the Government's domestic and international politics. In domestic politics, accelerated resettlement offered more opportunities to turn nationalized, but poorly-managed, commercial farms into collective or state farms, using the labour of resettlees. It also provided an opportunity to eliminate relief camps which offered the most visible indication of the state's failure to make good on its promise to eradicate famine after Haile Sellassie. Dawit has admitted elsewhere that resettlement also provided an avenue for the Government to distribute "people who. . . [had]

¹²⁴ Dawit, Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, pp.288-89.

¹²⁵ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, "The Power of Decision-Making in-Post-Revolution Ethiopia," in Marina Ottaway, ed., The Political Economy of Ethiopia, p.64.

accepted the revolution along sensitive parts" of the country and to remove those who had not, and were accessible to opposition groups, to distant lands in order to deprive-anti-Government groups of political support and potential recruits.¹²⁶

The first phase of the accelerated resettlement program began in November 1984. The Government caused about 70,000 people to be moved from Tigray in northern Ethiopia to Keffa, Wollega and Illubabor in the southwest.¹²⁷ They consisted of people who were willing to resettle. Their enthusiasm stemmed from official deception. State radio propaganda which promised resettles private land, schools, grinding mills, clinics, and free agricultural inputs induced many to voluntarily register for resettlement.¹²⁸ In some areas, such as Pawe, in northeastern Ethiopia, the government fulfilled some of its promises. But in Asosa, in southwestern Ethiopia, the volunteers found the new environment disappointing. As in many resettlement areas, malaria and other diseases killed the resettles; they were not provided with prophylactic medicines. When news of unfulfilled promises and accounts of

¹²⁶ See Dawit, Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, pp.288-89. Dawit's point is confirmed in author's tape interview with Tesfaye Mekasha, former vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Imperial Government, Addis Ababa, 30 July 1995.

¹²⁷ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.297.

¹²⁸ Author's tape interviews with Amhara, Oromo and Kembatta settlers in Pawe, Gojjam Administrative Region, 1 October 1995.

conditions in some resettlement sites filtered back to Tigray and Wollo, peasants became more reluctant to emigrate.¹²⁹

The refusal of many peasants to resettle did not alter the eagerness of the Government to enforce the programme. According to Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Mengistu articulated the reasons for enforcing resettlement at an emergency meeting of party officials in February 1985:

Almost all of you here realize that we have security problems. The guerrillas operating in many of these areas do so with great help from the population. The people are like the sea and the guerrillas are like fish swimming in that sea. Without the sea there will be no fish. We have to drain the sea, or if we cannot completely drain it we must bring it to a level where they will lack room to move at will, and their movements will be easily restricted.¹³⁰

The second phase of the accelerated resettlement programme began at the end of February 1985. It was even more destructive of human life and spirit. It abandoned all pretence of voluntary participation. Government soldiers picked people from the streets, markets and farms for resettlement. Random abductions and the failure to properly register them led to the separation of families.¹³¹ Many of the

¹²⁹ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.297;

¹³⁰ Statement attributed to Mengistu Haile Mariam in Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, p.298.

¹³¹ After an interview with a group of 15 village elders about the resettlement campaign in Ebinat in Gojjam administrative region, on 7 October 1995, a mother of about 62 years besought the author to help bring back her daughter who had been taken from the market for resettlement by militiamen in 1985. She had hitherto not seen or heard from the daughter.

captives had sufficient stocks of food and land to make their resettlement unnecessary.¹³² According to Dawit Wolde Giorgis, the WPE official in charge of resettlement, Sgt. Legesse Asfaw, ordered chairmen of peasant associations to build special concentration camps in northern and southwestern Ethiopia to detain those who resisted resettlement or attempted to escape.¹³³

The zeal of party enthusiasts to implement the programme overrode their concern for the sanctity of life.¹³⁴ Paulos Milkias has argued that about 100,000 people perished in the resettlement process or after their arrival in resettlement camps.¹³⁵ RRC workers witnessed the death of "hundreds" of infants, the elderly, and the weak under a state policy which Dawit has described as tantamount to the "genocide of helpless people."¹³⁶ The process of resettlement and the conditions in some resettlement camps, such as Asosa's, attracted criticism from abroad. The Wall Street Journal characterized the Ethiopian resettlement program of 1984 and 1985 as

¹³² Author's tape interviews with resettlees at Pawe, Gojjam Administrative Region, 1 October 1995 and with peasants at Mersa, North Wollo Administrative Zone, 20 October 1995.

¹³³ Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, p.300-1.

¹³⁴ Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, p.301. See also Peter Niggli, "Ethiopian Resettlement: Vomit and Death," Wall Street Journal, 27 January 1986, p.24.

¹³⁵ Paulos Milkias, "An Appraisal of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution," p.22. See also Wall Street Journal, "Today's Holocaust," 27 January 1986, p.24.

¹³⁶ Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, pp.300, 301, 304.

"government-organized group murder" which "shape[d] up as a mass extermination on the order of the Khmer Rouge killing fields and the deportation of Armenians in 1915."¹³⁷ While it is true that many people died during and after the resettlement program, precise figures on the resettlement mortality and the total number of deaths are disputable, since no one kept accurate statistics.

Far from being the well-meaning or effective response to hunger which the Government officially claimed, resettlement in the 1980s neither motivated peasants nor increased the food supply.¹³⁸ In its final phase, resettlement became a human rights disaster. By the end of 1986, an estimated 700,000 out of the anticipated 1.5 million had been resettled. Most of the settlements became a burden on the RRC as the resettles had no desire to produce food on a collective basis. Conflicts between indigenous groups and settlers, as well as attacks by anti-Government groups on settlements, made life hazardous in the settlement camps.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ The Wall Street Journal, "Today's Holocaust," 27 January 1986, p.24. See also Robert Kaplan, Surrender or Starve, pp. 106, 110; Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb, Politics and the Ethiopian Famine, p.193; Medecines Sans Frontieres (France), "Mass Deportations in Ethiopia," Confidential Report, December 1985, pp.51, 65.

¹³⁸ Dawit, Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, pp.290.

¹³⁹ The EPRP attacked the Pawe settlement, in Gojjam. See Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.118.

Villagization

Villagization affected more people than the resettlement programme. The idea behind villagization was noble. It sought to bring scattered homesteads and households together into centralized villages in order for the government to promote the rational use of land and for it to easily reach peasants in the distribution of social amenities such as clinics and clean water. It began in Bale, in southeastern Ethiopia in 1977, as a means of safeguarding the lives of people who lived in the line of fire during the Ethiopian-Somali war. In July 1985, the government extended the idea to eight administrative regions and put about 5.5 million people in clustered villages by 1986.¹⁴⁰ The Government publically represented villagization as a means to modernize rural life and reform traditional agriculture. However, as the domestic struggle for power intensified, and as keeping Ethiopia together took precedence over eradicating famine in state priorities, villagization offered the embattled state another avenue to maintain a close watch on peasants.

The centralized villages spanned the major food producing regions of Shoa, Arsi, Bale, Gondar and Gojjam, as well as Harar, Wollo, Tigray and Wollega, where ethnic-based

¹⁴⁰ Alemayehu Lirenso, "Villagization: Policies and Prospects," in Siegfried Pausewang et al., Ethiopia: Rural Development Options, p.136.

opposition to the government was intense.¹⁴¹ Like resettlement, the villagization policy of the military government also lowered peasant morale and national food production. When peasants moved from their houses, which were often close to their farms, farming became less efficient. They walked many more miles to their farms than they originally had. That situation aggravated crop losses.¹⁴²

Villagization did not guarantee all the social amenities that the government promised, but some villages had the health stations, schools, grain mills and markets.¹⁴³ However, the collective food production policy which the government enforced on the inhabitants of the villages bred resentment and offered little incentive towards exertion. Only fear of being executed for deserting the villages or being branded as a "reactionary" or "counter-revolutionary" for protesting kept many disaffected people in the villages and on the collective farms.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Solomon Bellette, "Ethiopia's Agricultural Production Strategies: An Overview," in Proceedings of the National Workshop on Food Strategies for Ethiopia Held at Alemaya University of Agriculture, Ethiopia, 8-12 December 1986, pp.81-82; Paulos Milkias, "An Appraisal of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution," Part III, Ethiopian Review (November 1993): 22.

¹⁴² Author's tape interview with participants in the Model Villagization Project at Harbu, Kalu woreda, South Wollo Administrative Region, 18 October 1995.

¹⁴³ Alemayehu Lirensso, "Villagization: Policies and Prospects," p.142.

¹⁴⁴ Author's tape interview with participants in the Model Villagization Project at Harbu, Kalu woreda, South Wollo

The Soviet Union criticized the wastefulness and inefficiency of the Mengistu Government's collective and state farms in September 1985.¹⁴⁵ Moscow's repudiation of the "socialist" policies and its call for the privatization of state farms and the provision of realistic price incentives to peasants showed how far apart the Soviet Union and Ethiopia stood by 1985 in their political relations and conceptions of socialism.¹⁴⁶ They demonstrated the readiness of the Soviet Government to disassociate itself from the famine and impoverishment which the Ethiopian Government's opportunistic approach to Marxism brought upon Ethiopian peasants.

According to Dawit Wolde Giorgis, the Soviet "bombshell" stunned Mengistu, but did not immediately wean him from his agricultural policies. Dawit believes that Mengistu and his advisors kept the state farms for their public relations significance. The mechanized, but less profitable state farms served as exhibits for foreign visitors from whom Mengistu still hoped to extract praise for the Ethiopian revolution.¹⁴⁷ Because of the difficulties of managing the state farms, the government turned some of them into resettlement and

Administrative Region, 18 October 1995.

¹⁴⁵ Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, p.275.

¹⁴⁶ See Grigori Polyakov, "Soviet-Ethiopian Cooperation in Agriculture," in Siegfried Pausewang et al., Ethiopia: Rural Development Options, p.84.

¹⁴⁷ Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, Red Tears, p.275.

collective farms.¹⁴⁸ By 11 September 1987, when the Workers Party of Ethiopia declared Ethiopia a People's Democratic Republic (PDRE), the state farms covered an area of 203,000 hectares constituting about 3.5 percent of the land under cultivation. They covered 238,000 hectares of land in 1981.¹⁴⁹ Despite absorbing an average of 64 per cent of state expenditure on agriculture between 1984 and 1986, the state farms operated at an annual loss of 80 million Birr.¹⁵⁰

Reflections and Volte-face, 1990-1991

Mengistu built a political career on denunciations of the Imperial Government for its "exploitation and oppression" of peasants.¹⁵¹ Despite the deepening of that exploitation and oppression by the government he led, Mengistu hailed the "success" of his government in lifting Ethiopia from "the dark

¹⁴⁸ Solomon Bellette, "Ethiopia's Agricultural Production Strategies: An Overview," in Proceedings of the National Workshop on Food Strategies for Ethiopia Held at Alemaya University of Agriculture, Ethiopia, 8-12 December 1986, pp. 81-82.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Dessalegn Rahmato, "Cooperatives, State Farms and Smallholder Production," p.106.

¹⁵¹ "Report Delivered to the First Congress of [Commission for Organizing the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia] (COPWE) by Comrade Mengistu Haile Mariam, Chairman of the PMAC and COPWE and Commander-in-chief of the Revolutionary Army," Addis Ababa, 16 June 1980, p.32. See also "May Day Address Delivered to the Entire Masses of the Ethiopian People," Addis Ababa, 1 May 1984, p.16.

era of the feudal system" to "the bright era of socialism" during the tenth anniversary of the deposition of what Mengistu called, "the atrocious feudal monarchy."¹⁵² However, in March 1990, Mengistu admitted the failure of his government to eradicate famine. In his search for the causes of famine during his regime, Mengistu placed emphasis on "man-made obstacles and ecological imbalance." These included "drought. . . [and] weaknesses in plan implementation," the activities of the EPLF and TPLF and "external enemies" who provided anti-Government groups with "arms and logistic supplies....through the port of a neighbouring country."¹⁵³

Like the Imperial Government, the Revolutionary Government blamed its failure to eliminate famine on "natural calamity" despite the calamities which its collectivization, resettlement, crop pricing and marketing policies produced. By March 1990, not only had the Government failed to prevent famine, its policies had also generated considerable domestic antipathy among peasants which anti-government movements exploited to broaden their domestic and external support.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² See "Address by Mengistu Haile Mariam to the Entire People of Ethiopia On the Occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Ethiopian Revolution," Addis Ababa, 12 September 1984, p.2.

¹⁵³ See Documents of the 11th Plenum of the CC of the WPE, "Report by Mengistu Haile Mariam: Resolutions Adopted by the Plenum," Addis Ababa, 6 March 1990, pp.3-5.

¹⁵⁴ Author's tape interview with Tesfaye Mekasha Amare, former vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Imperial Government, Addis Ababa, 30 July 1995.

Mengistu's verbal assaults on the Haile Sellassie Government in the 1980s gave way to appeals to its legacies at the dawn of the demise of his regime in 1990. At a time when the Mengistu government's agricultural policies had demoralised peasants and fuelled domestic opposition to it, Mengistu appealed to the patriotic instincts of all Ethiopians to rise against the EPLF and TPLF and defend Ethiopia's independent heritage. That heritage was an historical achievement of the Imperial Government which the Revolutionary Government sought and also failed to preserve. Mengistu's accusation against "secessionists" of "inhuman and genocide [sic] acts against rival groups favouring...national unity" did not arouse any significant domestic and international sympathy.¹⁵⁵

Mengistu's reflections on why his government chose a "socialist path of development" are noteworthy. As he reminisced:

The fact that the Soviet Union, China and various other countries that made socialism their guiding ideology managed to overcome economic backwardness in a relatively short . . . time offered a vivid practical example. Moreover, the desire to redress the economic injustices imposed upon the people by the feudal system, particularly resolving the land question on a just basis, as well as the strong desire to cement the unity of Ethiopian nationalities on the basis of equality, . . . contribut[ed] to the choice of the path of development adopted by the forces of the revolution.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Documents of the 11th Plenum of the CC of the WPE, "Report by Mengistu Haile Mariam: Resolutions Adopted by the Plenum," 6 March 1990, p.9.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p.20.

Mengistu argued that "the choice [of socialism] was not the personal conviction...of a few," but the product of "written correspondence" from supporters and "mass demonstrations in Addis Ababa and other parts of the country" in support of the military council.¹⁵⁷ Beneath his struggle to absolve the Revolutionary Government of blame for causing famine in Ethiopia and possibly facing the death penalty for his failure was the sobering, but belated admission by Mengistu that no perfect formula for organizing human society existed and the "development model in one country cannot be replicated in another."¹⁵⁸

Just as external and internal factors influenced its choice of "socialism" as a formula for agricultural development in 1974, "external changes" and "objective conditions...in the country" compelled "change or corrective measures" in 1990.¹⁵⁹ Against the background of the fall of the Soviet Union and the predominance of the World Bank's structural adjustment principles in the foreign policies of Western nations, and frustrated by losses on the battlefield and the failures of its socialist economic policies, the Mengistu Government made a dramatic volte-face in March 1990. It adopted "a new economic policy" based on "state, private

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p.21.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., pp.30, 47.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p.30.

and cooperative ownership."¹⁶⁰ What seemed new in that policy was the introduction of "free market pricing," and the abolition of the grain control posts and the grain quota system. The Government gave members of collective farms the liberty to abolish the farms and work privately.¹⁶¹ It was not only agricultural policy that changed. The Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE) was renamed the Democratic Unity Party of Ethiopia (DUPE).¹⁶² These "corrective measures" came very late to alter the objective conditions generated by the manner in which power was conceptualized and exercised in Ethiopia. Their significance lay only in the penetrating reflections of the revolution's ruthless leader, Mengistu Haile Mariam:

How long will others continue to provide us with food supplies as we remain inextricably locked in conflict? And for how long will the name Ethiopia be synonymous with dependence and alms-seeking?"¹⁶³

Conclusion

The military government's seizure of power was legitimated by disillusionment with famine and the land tenure system in Ethiopia as dramatic manifestations of the politics of the Imperial state. The Revolutionary Government contended that by reforming the structure of access to land, restructuring local government, reorganizing production and

¹⁶⁰ "Report by Mengistu Haile Mariam: Resolutions Adopted by the Plenum," 6 March 1990, p.31.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., pp.36, 53.

¹⁶² Ibid., pp.42-43.

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp. 45, 47,

marketing methods and participating in food production, the post-Imperial state could evolve a process which would give peasants the means to overcome famine. Once it reformed the land tenure system, as a key part of its struggle to erase the lingering legacy of its predecessor, the Revolutionary Government mobilized support around its quest for power and enforced national unity. Far from pioneering a reformation of state policy and behaviour as part of a policy to eradicate famine, the Revolutionary Government pursued misguided agricultural policies which fuelled the flames of war and fostered famine. State extractions of food from peasants impoverished them, its tax policies and collectivization measures bred resentment and the conscription of peasants as soldiers by the Government and its opponents to wage war undermined food production.

Growing famine in revolutionary Ethiopia not only demonstrated the failure of state agricultural policies, and the dysfunctional atmosphere in which they were implemented, it also exposed their conceptual errors. If collectivized agriculture was meant to nurture egalitarian social relations, as part of the government's enforced national unity policy, it missed the fact that Ethiopian peasants accepted and admired status differentiation which arose from individual enterprise.¹⁶⁴ The Revolutionary Government may have sought to

¹⁶⁴ See Dessalegn Rahmato, "Land Policy in Ethiopia at the Crossroads," Proceedings of the Second Workshop of the Land Tenure Project, No 8, October 1994, p.14.

harness what historian Tekalign Wolde-Mariam calls a "redistributive ethic" in Ethiopian culture.¹⁶⁵ However, in turning that idea into the conceptual framework of its agricultural policies, the Mengistu Government failed to understand what geographer Mesfin Wolde-Mariam has called the "psycho-social" make-up of Ethiopian peasants.¹⁶⁶

The peasant vision of post-Imperial rural agriculture was far different from what the military government and its civilian enthusiasts envisioned. Ethiopian peasants resented student and state intrusions into their labour and their food production patterns. That resentment, born of unaltered relations between state and peasant, made "revolution" and "socialist" agriculture ineffective in encouraging Ethiopian peasants to produce and to accumulate food to overcome famine.¹⁶⁷ As Siegfried Pausewang notes, "socialism" took the form of "a tradition of mutual help" in rural Ethiopia.¹⁶⁸ Peasants who came together to produce food did so as a part of

¹⁶⁵ Author's conversation with Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, Department of History, Addis Ababa University.

¹⁶⁶ Author's tape interview with Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, Addis Ababa, 8 March 1995. See also Marina and David Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, p.63.

¹⁶⁷ Author's tape interviews with Professor Mesfin Wolde Mariam, Addis Ababa, 8 March 1995; and with peasants in Pawe resettlement villages no.14 (mainly Amhara from Menz and Gishe in northern Shoa); no.23 (mainly Oromo from Yifat and Muga in North Shoa) and no.24 (mainly Amhara from Mota in Gojjam), Gojjam Administrative Region, 1 October 1995.

¹⁶⁸ Siegfried Pausewang, "The Peasant Perspective," in Siegfried Pausewang et al., Ethiopia: Rural Development Options, p.218.

their individual subsistence ethic, not as a substitute for it, as the military imagined.¹⁶⁹ Ethiopian peasants sensed the underlying truth of Albert Camus's insight that:

If someone takes away your bread, he suppresses your freedom at the same time. But if someone takes away your freedom, you may be sure your bread is threatened, for it depends no longer on you and your struggle, but on the whim of a master.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Albert Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death translated from French and with an introduction by Justin O'Brien (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p.94.

CHAPTER SIX

THE UNITED STATES AND THE ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION, 1975-1991

In twenty years the feudal organization that characterizes Ethiopia will be in definitive dissolution and a whole new group of self-made men may occupy the positions of power. However, we should not be surprised that a government in the control of this group would be much more difficult to work with..., assuming there is no strong monarch when they are in power, for Ethiopian nationalism has no more effective repository than in this often prideful group.

Reverend Joseph Simonson, U.S.
Ambassador to Ethiopia, 21 April
1955

Land reform, if pushed too fast, can be violently revolutionary but will have to come before a modern agricultural industry can be initiated. Too much speed to make a touchdown in this field could mean a disaster....

Lloyd Adcock, Agricultural Attache
of the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa,
22 May 1963

The American presence at Kagnaw since 1953 had encouraged the United States to contribute towards the economic bases for political stability in Ethiopia. But the unpublicized American decision in 1964 to ultimately leave the U.S. military installation for a modern base on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, put Ethiopia at the margins of U.S. diplomatic priorities. Between 1964 and 1974, U.S. relations with Ethiopia were weakly propelled by the political necessity for the United States to maintain good relations

with Haile Sellassie under Cold War conditions.¹

As we noted in chapter two, the United States anticipated radical political change in Ethiopia as Emperor Haile Sellassie advanced in years.² Since American policymakers advocated no specific land reform policy in Ethiopia, they did not object to the land reform proclamation of the PMAC.³ In fact, there was an initial reservoir of goodwill in the U.S. Congress towards the military regime and its nationalization of land in Ethiopia.⁴ This occurred despite the traditional American distaste for policies which eliminated or undermined private ownership of property. Terrence Lyons has observed that some American officials thought in 1976 that if the United States intended to assist development efforts in Africa, it should "learn to live and work cooperatively with

¹ Author's conversation with Edward M. Korry, former U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia (1963-1966), 26 September 1997.

² See Harold G. Marcus, Ethiopia, Great Britain and the United States, p. 179.

³ See John M. Malone, Jr., Resident Representative of the World Bank, to Dr. Dangatchew Yirgu, Minister of Agriculture, PMAC, *Personal and Confidential*, 20 January 1975, Ministry of Natural Resources, Development and Environmental Protection (MNRDEP) Archives Division, Addis Ababa, World Bank File, and also Terrence Lyons, "Reaction to Revolution: United States-Ethiopian Relations, 1974-1977," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, 1994, pp. 176-179.

⁴ Author's conversation with Edward Korry, 22 September 1997.

self-determined socialist regimes."⁵

U.S-Ethiopian relations descended into conflict when the PMAC collectivized agriculture, regimented the peasantry in controlled villages, repressed the population and indiscriminately executed people without due process. The United States reassessed its attitude towards the Revolutionary Ethiopian Government and sought a new framework of relations with it in August 1976.

When the United States reassessed its views of the PMAC, it faced a dual challenge in the formulation of a policy towards it. It faced the humanitarian challenge of helping people in need in Ethiopia without bolstering the political and economic system which created some of Ethiopia's problems. The second challenge was the economic one of providing development assistance to an incompetent and unstable government which insisted on determining its own path of agricultural development with the aid of American development funds and food.⁶ This chapter deals with how the United States reconciled these challenges and explores the context in which it did that. It argues that the grave violations of human rights by the Revolutionary Ethiopian Government discouraged

⁵ See Terrence Lyons, "Reaction to Revolution: United States-Ethiopian Relations, 1974-1977," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, 1994, p. 179.

⁶ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, RRC Commissioner, to Brother Augustine O'Keefe, 21 September 1984, CRDA Archives Department. RRC Files: June-December 1984.

the United States from offering agricultural development assistance to Ethiopia. Instead, the United States gave food and limited rehabilitation assistance to help prevent or relieve famine and to gain a voice in the promotion of human rights in the country.⁷

The chapter draws heavily on evidence from the correspondence between the USAID-E and the RRC. In the absence of some pertinent, but classified, U.S. diplomatic sources on the period, as well as the relevant, but closed records of the Ethiopian Politburo, the AMC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the messages and reports of the RRC and the USAID-E, and interviews with important actors on both sides have provided alternative avenues for observing the interaction between the United States and Ethiopia in the prevention and alleviation of famine from 1975 to 1991.

Politics of Mutual Suspicion

The United States and Ethiopia conducted their relations in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion, but with a determination to continue relations. A report which Congressman Les Aspin (D.- Wisconsin) obtained from the State Department on 14 January 1976 fuelled the debate on policy towards the PMAC. The "secret State Department report" alleged that Ethiopia had a foreign exchange reserve of "\$312 million" in 1976 as a

⁷ See Raymond W. Copson and Alan K. Yu, "Ethiopia: U.S. Foreign Assistance Facts," Updated 8 February 1989, pp. 1, 11.

result of the increase in the price of coffee, Ethiopia's major export crop, on the world coffee market.⁸ Consequently, Congressman Aspin considered it inappropriate and "folly for the United States to give aid to nations that have the resource to handle their own problems." He vowed to oppose any assistance to Ethiopia "until it [was] absolutely clear that aid [was] needed...."⁹

The State Department's allegation directly sabotaged the intention of the Africa Bureau of the AID to use American humanitarian assistance to promote the long-term economic development of Ethiopia, as we observed in chapter four. It bolstered the resolve of the State Department and some Congressmen to keep humanitarian assistance and long-term development aid separate from each other in American policy towards the new regime in Addis Ababa. Furthermore, the unstable nature of the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), its state farm and collectivized agricultural policies and human rights abuses became critical factors shaping U.S. policy.

In August 1976, the Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs critically examined the "character, composition, competence and prospects" of the military regime as Congress

⁸ Press Release from Congressman Les Aspin, "Ethiopian Famine Could Have Been Avoided," 14 January 1976, Washington, D.C., RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU/311. The author has not found any evidence to substantiate the content of the report in his research in Ethiopian and American archives.

⁹ Ibid.

struggled to situate its Ethiopian policy in an appropriate context. The need to re-examine U.S. policy arose from the "socialist revolutionary objectives" of the military council.¹⁰ They convinced Congress that the direction of the Ethiopian revolution had been radically altered, a fact which required "a fundamental reassessment of American policies."¹¹ The Congressional determination of the nature of the PMAC also came in the wake of domestic conflicts in Ethiopia.¹² The changing American view of the Ethiopian revolution coupled with the nationalization of American property by the PMAC in 1975 and 1976 made it unlikely that economic assistance would become the primary motif of relations between Washington and Addis Ababa.¹³ In fact, Congress determined that U.S. economic aid to Ethiopia would be wasted on the PMAC's "Marxist economic policies."¹⁴

¹⁰ See Opening Statement of Senator Dick Clark (D-Iowa), Chairman of the Subcommittee, in Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, -4-6 August 1976, 1.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Raymond W. Copson and Alan K. Yu, Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division of the Catholic Relief Services, "Ethiopia: U.S. Foreign Assistance Facts," Updated 8 February 1989, p.2.

¹³ United States Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, 2nd Session, 94th Congress, 4-6 August 1976, p.2.

¹⁴ Raymond W. Copson and Alan K. Yu, "Ethiopia: U.S. Foreign Assistance Facts," updated, 8 February 1989, p.13.

The testimonies of experts who appeared before the Senate Subcommittee reinforced this view. Donald Levine, a Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago urged Congress to be more interventionist in its policy toward the Ethiopian Government. He focused his criticism of past U.S. policies in Ethiopia on the failure of American governments to use them to compel the Haile Sellassie government to promote economic development and political liberalization.¹⁵ Within that context, Levine advised Congress to set conditions for American economic assistance to Ethiopia and use American aid as a lever to guide the conduct of the PMAC.¹⁶ As we have already observed, the United States pressured the Imperial Government to pursue political and economic reforms, but the Emperor rebuffed them.

The perception that the PMAC might possibly be replaced by the equally anti-American and more Marxist EPRP dominated the attitudes of members of Congress and private American citizens interested in Africa. Wary of Ethiopia's human rights violations, John Spencer, an American citizen who had served as an advisor to the Imperial Government, and who testified with Donald Levine, was reluctant to endorse American economic assistance to a regime which he thought would soon be

¹⁵ See "Statement of Prof. Donald Levine, University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill.," in United States Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, 2nd Session, 94th Congress, 4-6 August 1976, p.6.

¹⁶ Ibid.

overthrown by the many armed groups which opposed it.¹⁷

Senator Dick Clark (D-Iowa), chairman of the Subcommittee, articulated the Congressional concern that:

if indeed...[the PMAC was] unstable and another government...[came] to power which,...for the sake of argument, might be more broadly representative, more popular at any rate, that new government...might view the U.S. association with...[the PMAC] in such a way that it would make [it] much more anti-American for future purposes.¹⁸

The Subcommittee on African Affairs supported a cautious policy towards the PMAC which a successor regime could not label as an American effort to bolster an unpopular Ethiopian government. All political groups in post-Imperial Ethiopia had accused the United States of bolstering the Imperial Ethiopian Government. Congress viewed a humanitarian policy as one that would not associate the United States too closely with the repressive policies of an unpopular, undemocratic and insecure regime. It decided in August 1976 that the human rights atrocities of the military regime and the need for the United States "to stay alert to violations of human rights in all U.S. aid recipient countries," presented the most appropriate framework for dealing with the Ethiopian government.¹⁹

¹⁷ Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, 4-6 August 1976, 42.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.90.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.3.

Human Rights as the Context for Bilateral Relations

Political groups which opposed the PMAC, also known as Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia (PMGSE), influenced the choice of human rights as the context of U.S. relations with Revolutionary Ethiopia. In his letter to Congressman Henry S. Reuss (D-Wisconsin), dated 19 February 1976, which Reuss passed on to Senator Clark, Osman Saleh, spokesman for the Popular Liberation Front for Eritrea, pointed to the use of U.S. military equipment by the PMGSE "to destroy Iritrean [sic] lives and properties indiscriminately."²⁰ The complaint came at a time when "the United States [had] programed \$6 million worth of military equipment for Ethiopia for fiscal year 1977," in response to a request from the Ethiopian Government.²¹

Congressman Reuss drew the attention of the Congressional committee to the burning of villages which the Ethiopian government suspected of having assisted insurgents, the use of "American-built planes...to bomb Eritrean villages and food crops" and claims by Osman Sabbe that the PMGSE "interfere[d] with food and medical relief" for about 400,000 Eritrean

²⁰ See Osman Saleh Sabbe, Spokesman of ELP/PLF, to Henry S. Reuss, Congress of the United States, in Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, 4-6 August 1976, 61-62.

²¹ Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, 4-6 August 1976, 2.

refugees in Sudan in 1975.²² He considered these measures by the Ethiopian state as "verging on genocide" and advised the Subcommittee on African Affairs to "launch its most constructive new Africa policy in Ethiopia."²³

The deliberate destruction of food crops and other means of survival of civilian populations perceived to support rebel groups contravened the Geneva Conventions, which affirmed the right of civilians to food under conditions of war.²⁴ Moreover, the PMAC's "extreme solutions to disagreements over policy," which led to its execution of General Aman Andom, its first chairman in 1974, not only exposed its brutal nature but also its potential to perpetrate genocide.²⁵

As we shall observe in chapter seven, the consistent patterns of human rights abuses which became the focus of Congressional discussions raise questions about the nature of

²² Ibid., p. 66.

²³ See Henry S. Reuss, Member of Congress, to Hon. Dick Clark, Chairman, Subcommittee on Africa, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 3 August 1976, in Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, 4-6 August 1976, 66, 68.

²⁴ For an analysis of the international legal provisions prohibiting the use of starvation as means of warfare, see Larry Minear and Thomas G. Weiss, Humanitarian Action in Times of War (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), pp. 11-14.

²⁵ See the response of Thomas J. Farer, Rutgers University Law School, to questions from Senator Dick Clark in Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, 4-6 August 1976, 95.

the lethal acts which the Ethiopian government committed and whether its patterns of abuse constituted crimes against humanity or genocide. At the centre of that debate is the controversy over whether or not the Ethiopian government possessed or had demonstrated the criminal intent to destroy particular ethnic, religious or political groups in Ethiopia by killing members of the group, causing bodily or mental harm to them, deliberately inflicting conditions aimed at exterminating them or forcibly transferring children of the targeted group to another group with intent to stymie their reproduction.²⁶

Senator Clark summed up the predicament which the U.S. Senate faced in resolving this debate when it determined its policy towards Ethiopia. As he warned:

If this is such an anti-American government, if it is in such constant violation of human rights..., does it make sense for our Government to be its sole and greatest supporter?²⁷

Congress faced this problem at a time when it had already endorsed, in February 1975, a US\$ 4.6 million grant for the construction of feeder roads in southern Ethiopia to improve access to remote villages affected by drought.²⁸

²⁶ See the U.N. definition of genocide and a detailed analysis of it in Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp.8-23, 44-47.

²⁷ Ibid., pp.96, 128.

²⁸ Chanyalew Alemayehu, Head of Road Services and Project Coordinator, Ethiopian Road Authority, to Ato Shiferaw

The decision by President Carter, after his Inauguration in January 1977, to make Ethiopia a test case of American human rights foreign policy suggests that the August 1976 Senate hearing had an impact on U.S. policy towards Ethiopia.²⁹ However, the focus on human rights as a framework for U.S.-Ethiopian relations inevitably bound the United States to display a humanitarian interest in the promotion of the economic welfare of Ethiopia. The United States could, however, not fulfil the moral and political demands of its human rights diplomacy without operating within the constraints of the economic programs of the Ethiopian government and without being drawn into the domestic politics of Ethiopia. On this score, Washington faced a third challenge, that of finding the appropriate levers for promoting the economic welfare of vulnerable groups and upholding their dignity without bolstering insurgent groups or legitimizing their armed opposition to the PMGSE.

The PMGSE's anticipation of possible U.S. hostility solidified its suspicion of the United States. According to Dawit Wolde Giorgis, an official of the Revolutionary Government who defected in 1985, many of the members of the military government possessed an anti-American and anti-

Demmesie, General Manager of Ethiopian Road Authority, "Grant 663-F-601, Activity E-2, Road Construction," 9 August 1979, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/5.

²⁹ See Christopher Clapham, Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.61.

Western attitude because of their "narrow interpretation of revolutions," and American responses to them. As he points out, the Revolutionary Government:

expected that the United States would attempt to intervene militarily...[in Ethiopia] as it had...[done] in Cuba, Guatemala and Vietnam or that it might encourage forces inside and outside Ethiopia to reverse the Revolution.³⁰

The Ethiopian government received "information from unknown sources in Africa" about U.S. plans to intervene and destabilize Ethiopia in October 1977. One of the anonymous letters alleged that the United States intended "to assassinate the Ethiopian Head of State" and to use "forces hostile to Ethiopia" to overthrow the government through coordinated attacks "from...[the] Southwest and East."³¹ The letter identified "people in the State Department, CIA and U.S. Embassies in Kenya, the Sudan and Tanzania" as actively planning the invasion.³² In hindsight, the anonymous letter "may have been just a fabrication" but the Revolutionary Government took it seriously and it shaped many of its policies. The Government "desired" American intervention because it believed that "the greatness of...[the Ethiopia] revolution could only be measured by the reaction it generated

³⁰ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.35.

³¹ Ibid., p.36. This intelligence report must have influenced the government's decision in 1984 to resettle some of its loyalists in the southwestern and eastern regions of Ethiopia.

³² Ibid.

from the Imperialist camp."³³ The anticipation of an American-organized invasion "created panic and suspicion in the Foreign Office" and caused the Government to regard "every statement...from Washington" which had a hostile tone as confirming its suspicion that the United States would overthrow the government and derail the Ethiopian revolution.³⁴

U.S. Agricultural Assistance Policies, 1975-1979

The anti-American sentiment of the Ethiopian government and the anti-revolutionary ideology of the United States in the twentieth century did not prevent cooperation and accommodation between Ethiopia and the United States. U.S. human rights policy towards Ethiopia made the Carter administration eager to provide measured development and rehabilitation aid to assist Ethiopians who had been displaced by famine and war.³⁵ Despite Donald Levine's call for the conditioning of American aid, the decision of the Carter Administration to promote the economic welfare of vulnerable groups as a corollary of American human rights policy made the United States furnish its development assistance through the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. The United

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Frederick L. Chapin, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, Telegram No. 5253, "PL 480 Title II Emergency Request for Bale/Sidamo," 15 December 1978, RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 1., p.1.

States financed the construction of roads, a system to provide early-warning of famine and selected resettlement and food production projects.

As Washington planned to assist the resettlement of displaced people in Bale and Sidamo, the American Ambassador, Frederick Chapin, seemed willing to revise the negative view of the RRC which American officials shared with the UNDP office in Addis Ababa. In February 1976, the UNDP had denounced the RRC as a "bottleneck" which "should be avoided...."³⁶ However, in December 1978, the Embassy identified the RRC as "the only Ethiopian agency with any proven ...capacity to administer and manage" the American resettlement assistance program.³⁷

Road Construction

The Somali invasion of Ethiopia in 1977 disrupted work on the feeder roads in southern Ethiopia which the United States had financed in February 1975. Work on the Negele-Mega, Ginir-Imi and Imi-El Kere roads had already begun when the invasion

³⁶ See "Summary of A Meeting Held in the UNDP Conference Room with Mr. P.C. Stanissis, Special Advisor to the Legal [sic] Red Cross Societies, and Mr. Brian Wickland of [the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization] UNDRO on the 9th March 1976," World Food Programme Archives, Addis Ababa, United Nations Development Programme File.

³⁷ Frederick L. Chapin, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, Telegram No. 5253, "PL 480 Title II: Emergency Request for Bale/Sidamo," 15 December 1978, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 1., p.15.

occurred. The Somali soldiers burnt, and in some cases looted, much of the construction equipment.³⁸ It was the support of the USAID-E which prevented the Carter Administration from abandoning the three road construction projects after the outbreak of the Ethiopia-Somalia war. USAID-E sustained the interest of the AID in the project and succeeded in getting Congress to permit it to use the outstanding appropriation of 3.1 million Ethiopian Birr to purchase new equipment to resume work on the roads. U.S. assistance towards the construction of the Arba Minch-Konso-Jinka road made it easier for the RRC to reach peasants in the districts. Jinka was one of the inaccessible areas where airdrops of food had had to be made to relieve lethal famine in 1974.³⁹

To help the RRC to forecast famine and also enable American officials in Addis Ababa to distinguish real famine emergencies from perceived threats, the American government provided money, in September 1976, to help the RRC and the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture to strengthen the national Famine Early-Warning System (FEWS). Although many of the forecasts of the FEWS were speculative, and the Revolutionary

³⁸ Chanyalew Alemayehu, Head of Road Services and Project Coordinator, Ethiopian Road Authority, to Ato Shiferaw Demmesie, General Manager of Ethiopian Road Authority, "Grant 663-F-601, Activity E-2, Road Construction," Addis Ababa 9 August 1979, RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/5.

³⁹ Christian Relief and Development Agency (CRDA), "Minutes of the 129th General Meeting," 6 February 1978, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa. See also Princeton Lyman, Director of USAID-E, to Shimelis Adugna, RRC Commissioner, Addis Ababa, 14 June 1977, RRC Archives Division, FGU/3.

Government sabotaged its work as it became preoccupied with its survival, as we shall discuss in chapter seven, the system helped to provide useful information on crops, rainfall patterns and nutritional status in Ethiopia.⁴⁰

Resettlement

By February 1977, the United States had invested US\$ 700,000 in the Gode Accelerated Food Production project. The project had been designed by the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research to resettle nomads along the Wabe Shebelle, Gode and Kelafo rivers in southeastern Ethiopia and to assist the nomads to produce food. The Gode resettlement program became one of the successful joint U.S.-Ethiopian efforts to prevent lethal famine by enhancing food production in revolutionary Ethiopia.⁴¹

The termination of the 1953 U.S.-Ethiopian Mutual Defence Agreement by the PMAC on 30 April 1977 and its order to the U.S. Embassy to reduce its staff from fifty-six to twenty-eight further strained relations between Washington and Addis Ababa, but did not end them.⁴² In August 1978, the United

⁴⁰ Princeton Lyman, Director of the USAID-E, to Major Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, Deputy RRC Commissioner, 27 December 1976, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/27 "USA Agreement."

⁴¹ Jesse L. Snyder, Head of the Arid Lands Division of USAID-E, to Shimelis Adugna, RRC Commissioner, 2 February 1977, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/5.

⁴² Merahehiwot Gabremariam, "Ethio-U.S. Relations," Ethioscope, Vol 1, No.2 (January 1995): 15.

States provided US\$ 400,000 to the RRC "to cover...expenses associated with...[feeding and resettling] approximately 200,000 displaced persons...in...Bale and Sidamo Administrative Regions."⁴³ Apart from providing the funds for the purchase of seeds and farming tools for the displaced, the Carter Administration provided 20,000 litres of Malathion insecticide to the Desert Locust Control Organization for East Africa (DLCOEA) located in Addis Ababa to combat locusts in Ethiopia.⁴⁴ The Carter administration also financed aerial photographs of the land which the PMGSE selected to resettle the displaced and provided additional funds for the purchase of wheat and sorghum seeds as well as oxen to restore the displaced persons to their pre-war conditions.⁴⁵ The State Department and AID permitted the RRC to sell 12,750 metric tons of American Title II wheat to generate local currency to meet the cost of providing seeds and agricultural inputs to the displaced in Bale and Sidamo.

⁴³ See USAID-E, "Emergency Grant Letter: Emergency Support, Bale/Sidamo," 31 August 1978, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/27, USA "Agreement," DEADFILE.

⁴⁴ Jesse L. Snyder, Acting Director of the USAID-E, *For Immediate Release*, "United States to Provide Birr 513,618 to RRC Food Aid to Wollo/Tigray Famine Area," 27 June 1978, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26, USA AID, Vol. 1.

⁴⁵ Ibid. See also Margaret Bonner, Acting Program Officer of the USAID-E, "United States To Provide PL 480 Title II Food to RRC for Bale/Sidamo," 12 February 1979, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 1; Haile Mariam Wolde-Kidan, Deputy Commissioner of the RRC, to Edward B. Hogan, Director of the USAID-E, 15 March 1979, RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/26, "USA AID," Vol. 1.

The reservations which the United States had about the regimentation of peasants in revolutionary Ethiopia did not prevent it from financing the activities of some peasant associations.⁴⁶ On 31 August 1977, the Carter administration granted US\$ 196,000 to strengthen the capacity of the peasant association in Gamo Gofa "to plan, manage and evaluate rural development activities."⁴⁷ This act advanced Washington's human rights policy in Ethiopia more than it signified its approval of the socialist agricultural policies of the Revolutionary Ethiopian Government. U.S. support of resettlement activities and peasant associations demonstrated the willingness of the Carter administration to work with the Ethiopian government to help vulnerable groups in rural Ethiopian society to achieve a measure of freedom and dignity. The RRC acknowledged that U.S. assistance to its resettlement efforts in Bale and Sidamo had made a positive impact on the lives of some Ethiopians. It enabled the resettled peasants and pastoralists to produce their own food and attain a degree of self-sufficiency.⁴⁸ It was through these calculated assistance schemes that the Carter administration reconciled the challenge of pursuing a

⁴⁶ Edward B. Hogan, Director of the USAID-E, to Shimelis Adugna, RRC Commissioner, Addis Ababa, 28 August 1979, RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/5.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Shimelis Adugna, Chief Commissioner, RRC, Addis Ababa, to Frederick L. Chapin, Ambassador, U.S. Embassy, Addis Ababa, 16 November 1979. RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/26, "USA AID," Vol. 1.

humanitarian policy within the boundaries of a detestable agricultural strategy conducted by a socialist revolutionary government in Addis Ababa. While Washington tried to open channels of communication, the Ethiopian government "shunned contact with Washington," obstructed many of the humanitarian programs of the United States and sought to use them to bolster its power.⁴⁹

Tense Relations

The mutual suspicion which characterized the U.S.-Ethiopian relationship also provided the basis for the misinterpretation of each other's actions by the two governments. The Ethiopian perception that the American government might undertake covert operations to undermine the Ethiopian revolution probably accounted for the order which the PMGSE gave to the USAID-E to discontinue its radio operations in Ethiopia in June 1978.⁵⁰ The USAID-E used its mobile radios to monitor agricultural projects which it undertook in conjunction with the RRC and the Ministry of Agriculture and Settlement.⁵¹ The radios had an assigned frequency of 7605 kHz. The USAID-E operated them for two hours daily under the watchful eye of the RRC. Probably, the PMGSE

⁴⁹ Merahehiwot Gabremariam, "Ethio-U.S. Relations," p.15.

⁵⁰ Kenneth H. Sharper, Acting Director of the USAID-E, to Ato Girma Engadazeuh, General Manager of the Ethiopian Telecommunications Service, Addis Ababa, 28 August 1978, RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/26, USA AID, Vol.1.

⁵¹ Ibid.

suspected covert U.S. involvement in the Somali invasion of Ethiopia from July 1977 to March 1978 on the basis of the content of the anonymous intelligence letters it received about U.S. plans to sponsor or assist the invasion of Ethiopia. Washington's failure to condemn the Somali invasion as Addis Ababa expected it to do, only served to deepen the Revolutionary Government's suspicion of the United States.⁵² Moreover, the consolidation of the military position of domestic insurgent groups such as the TPLF, WSLF and EPLF, in the course of the Somali invasion, reinforced the content of the anonymous letters and the relationship which the PMGSE drew between its revolution and American reactions to revolutions in Latin America.

The Ethiopian Government scrutinized USAID-E operations in 1978. It rejected claims by the USAID-E that it used its radios solely to communicate with its field staff and to monitor vehicle breakdowns and accidents that required immediate medical assistance.⁵³ Beside the withdrawal of the license of the USAID-E to operate its mobile radios, USAID-E expatriate staff faced additional unnecessary problems. The length of time that they waited to secure accommodation in

⁵² Freedom House, Ethiopia: The Politics of Famine (New York: Freedom House, 1990), p.26.

⁵³ Kenneth H. Sharper, Acting Director of the USAID-E, to Ato Girma Engadazeuh, General Manager of the Ethiopian Telecommunications Service, Addis Ababa, 28 August 1978, RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/26, USA AID, Vol.1.

Addis Ababa and the irregular manner in which the Government allocated fuel to those who worked on joint U.S.-Ethiopian agricultural projects struck the USAID-E as "unfortunate constraints to development."⁵⁴ The basis of the USAID-E concern lay in the fact that "other field personnel" had unimpeded access to these privileges.⁵⁵ USAID-E personnel could not easily obtain travel permits to conduct their assigned duties at research and experimental stations whereas "one other donor agency," which the USAID-E did not identify, had unrestricted permission to travel within the country.⁵⁶ When the problems went beyond the restriction of diplomatic privileges such as duty-free services, housing, and travel permits to "humiliation of a senior USAID-E technician," the USAID-E reacted sharply.⁵⁷ On 13 August 1978, the local authorities at Nazareth arrested a USAID-E expatriate staff member, Dr. Makarian, "at gun point." Dr. Makarian worked on a pulse research and farm development project as a contractual employee of the USAID-E and the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture and Settlement. After his arrest, he was "displayed outside the Awraja Governor's [Captain Girma's]

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Kenneth H. Sharper, Acting Director of the USAID-E, to Ato Zegeye Asfaw, Minister of Agriculture and Settlement, Addis Ababa, 24 August 1978, RRC Archives Department, FGU 3/19, USA Report.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

office without food for a period of six hours" before being informed that he had been arrested on suspicion of "subversive activities."⁵⁸

The local officials searched his home, denied him any communication with U.S. officials in Addis Ababa and "detained ...[him] as a prisoner at the kebele headquarters overnight." The officials of the kebele (urban association) at Nazareth forced Dr. Makarian "to purchase the fuel required to transport him under guard to Addis Ababa" and under circumstances which the USAID-E Director Kenneth Sharper described as "defying the most rudimentary concepts of authority and responsibility."⁵⁹ While the USAID-E expressed its "sincere desire to provide effective development assistance," it deplored such "indiscriminate search and seizure, detention without access to communication, and disregard for basic human rights and dignity" in Ethiopia.⁶⁰ Its reminder to the PMGSE that "foreign donor assistance cannot be effective without. . . cooperation from the host government" and the protection of technical personnel was a strong indication of acute stress in the U.S.-Ethiopian "development" partnership.

The Embassy's optimism in 1978 that it would enjoy a "satisfactory experience with RRC," and that "the RRC [would]

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

...deal with USAID[-E] in an open and frank manner with minimum risk...of deceit" did not bear fruit.⁶¹ The "distressingly slow rate" at which the RRC accounted for the disbursement of funds which it obtained from selling American food for rehabilitation efforts escalated the tensions.⁶² This issue, which we will discuss in detail in chapter eight, became one of the subjects of debate between the USAID-E and the RRC. The partnership of the American and Ethiopian government to prevent and relieve famine revealed deepening fracture lines as the summer of 1979 ended.

Limited Development Aid Reviewed

The Carter administration suspended official development assistance to Ethiopia on 5 July 1979 in accordance with two amendments to the U.S. Foreign Assistant Act.⁶³ These were the Hickenlooper and Brooke Amendments. These legislative instruments barred the United States from giving anything other than humanitarian aid to countries which had

⁶¹ Frederick L. Chapin, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Secretary of State, Telegram No. 5253, "PL 480 Title II: Emergency Request for Bale/Sidamo," 15 December 1978, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 1., p.15.

⁶² George T. McCloskey, Acting Director of the USAID-E, to Shimelis Adugna, RRC Commissioner, Addis Ababa, 30 May 1980, RRC Archives Division, "USA Agreements," DEADFILE.

⁶³ Edward Hogan, Director of USAID-E, to Shimelis Adugna, RRC Commissioner, "Notification for Termination of the Grant Agreement Between the Government of Ethiopia and the United States of America (Agreement No. 663-F-602)," 10 August 1996, Addis Ababa, RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/11 "USA Agreements."

nationalized American-owned property or had not paid their debts to the United States.⁶⁴ The Hickenlooper Amendment, which was adopted in 1962 in response to the nationalization of American property in Brazil in that year, was named after its author, Senator John Hickenlooper, a conservative Republican from Iowa.

The Hickenlooper Amendment was attached as Section 518 to the Foreign Assistance Appropriations Act in 1976. In 1979, Congress invoked it to restrain the United States from giving any form of development assistance to Ethiopia after it had nationalized the Kalamazoo Spice Company, an American-owned property in Ethiopia in 1975. By 1979 the Ethiopian government owed US\$ 30 million in unpaid compensation to American citizens whose properties it nationalized in 1975 and 1976.⁶⁵

The Brooke Amendment which was added as Section 620 (e) to the Foreign Assistance Act, in 1962, was also named after its author, Senator Edward Brooke, a Republican from Massachusetts. The Brooke Amendment prevented the United States from giving development aid to countries which had defaulted on their payment of U.S. loans for a period of over one year. USAID estimated that Ethiopia owed US\$ 6 million in

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Catholic Relief Services, "Quarterly Reviews of Implementation of the Emergency Food Aid Program with USAID," 16 November 1989, CRS Archives, Addis Ababa, File No. 511.USAID.

loan repayment arrears to the United States by 1979.⁶⁶

The United States did not confine its retaliatory policy to American aid programs.⁶⁷ In the course of the suspension of official U.S. aid to Ethiopia, the Carter administration opposed multilateral loans to Ethiopia.⁶⁸ Under it, the United States opposed World Bank and African Development Bank (ADB) loans to Ethiopia. In 1979, the United States voted "for the first time" against an ADB loan to the Revolutionary Government. In retaliation, the Ethiopian government asked Washington to recall its Ambassador to Ethiopia, Frederick Chapin, in August 1980.⁶⁹

Between 1979 and 1985, the United States focused exclusively on providing assistance to relieve famine or starvation situations in Ethiopia. As we will note in chapter eight, in order to enforce the Hickenlooper Amendment, the

⁶⁶ When Ethiopia turned to the Soviet Union for military equipment in 1977, it failed to repay past purchases of U.S. military equipment. See Raymond W. Copson and Alan K. Yu, "Ethiopia: U.S. Foreign Assistance Facts," Updated, 8 February 1989, p.12.

⁶⁷ Mark Duffield and John Prendergast, Without Troops and Tanks, pp. 36-37.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.36.

⁶⁹ Frederick L. Chapin began his diplomatic mission to Ethiopia in July 1978. When he was recalled the United States did not appoint an Ambassador to Ethiopia until 1991 and it did not revoke the application of the Hickenlooper amendment to Ethiopia until July 1982 when the United States and Ethiopia reached a "satisfactory agreement" on compensation for nationalized American properties. See Merahehiwot Gabremariam, "Ethio-U.S. Relations," p.15., and Raymond W. Copson and Alan K. Yu, "Ethiopia: U.S. Foreign Assistance Facts," Updated, 8 February 1989, p.12..

State Department attached conditions to American humanitarian aid to Ethiopia. It tied its response to Ethiopia's requests for American relief aid to the provision of data on food production and consumption levels in Ethiopia. The State Department and the American Embassy in Addis Ababa made vigorous efforts after 1979 to prevent American humanitarian assistance (emergency relief) from being used for development purposes (rehabilitation assistance) in Ethiopia.⁷⁰

RRC officials opposed the distinction which American officials drew between humanitarian aid and development assistance. The RRC maintained at the beginning of the Ethiopian Revolution and in its correspondence with the officials that it viewed emergency relief and rehabilitation or development aid as "two sides of the same coin." RRC Commissioner, Shimelis Adugna believed that "to do relief alone without rehabilitation [was] to perpetuate an emergency...."⁷¹

The controversy between the United States and Ethiopia over emergency assistance and rehabilitation aid lasted until May 1985, when the United States permitted its humanitarian aid to be used as a resource for medium and long-term

⁷⁰ Frederick L. Chapin, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Shimelis Adugna, RRC Commissioner, 20 May 1980, RRC Archives Division. FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 1.

⁷¹ Shimelis Adugna to Frederick L. Chapin, 31 May 1980, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 1.

development activities designed to prevent future famines.⁷² It was the Reagan administration which resolved that debate, although the Ethiopian government perceived the arrival of Ronald Reagan at the White House in January 1981 as ominous for U.S.-Ethiopian relations.⁷³ As we will note in chapter eight, despite its antipathy towards the Ethiopian government, the Reagan administration followed the accommodating policies of the Carter administration in its relations with Ethiopia.

The African Famine Relief and Recovery Act of 1985, which the Republican Congress passed into law, gave the USAID-E and non-governmental organizations in Ethiopia latitude to use emergency famine-relief resources for agricultural development.⁷⁴ After 1985, U.S. officials in Addis Ababa cooperated with the AMC, the Ethiopian Seed Corporation and peasant associations to obtain approximately 7,870 metric tons of local seeds valued at 6.62 million Ethiopian Birr to assist peasants to put more land under food cultivation in FY 1986.⁷⁵ American relief officials also permitted the RRC to use American food as payment for work on the construction of roads

⁷² See Fred C. Fischer, U.S. Coordinator for Emergency Relief, to Frank X. Carlin, Director of the U.S. Catholic Relief Services, 8 May 1985, CRS Archives, Addis Ababa, USAID File No 511.

⁷³ Mark Duffield and John Prendergast, Without Troops and Tanks, pp.15-16.

⁷⁴ Fred Fischer, "FY 1985 Operational Support Grant," in his private and unpublished Briefing Book.

⁷⁵ Fred Fischer, "FY 1986 Food For Seed Program," in Briefing Book.

and dams in Wollo, Tigray, Eritrea and Gondar in July 1985. The USAID-E financed projects which provided fertilizer, pesticides and farm animals, as well as health and water services to rural Ethiopians despite the official American position that the Ethiopian government should finance its own long-term development programs.⁷⁶

Apportioning Blame

In 1988, the United States was one-sided in its allotment of blame for the failure of the Ethiopian Government's agricultural policies to prevent and alleviate famine. It focused much of its criticism on the Ethiopian Revolutionary Government.⁷⁷ The Reagan administration justifiably condemned it for its "blatant disregard for human life as demonstrated by its use of food as a weapon...[and] its forced resettlement program." The United States threatened to impose economic sanctions on the Ethiopian Government by withholding its purchases of Ethiopian coffee, among other measures. But when it came to assessing the rebels contribution to famine, it only "urge[d] the rebel groups to cease attacks upon relief

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ See Embassy of the United States of America to Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, "Economic Sanctions Against Ethiopia," 12 October 1988, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Addis Ababa; John Sedlins, USIA Staff Writer, Washington, D.C., "U.S. Blames All Warring Parties for Famine in Ethiopia," 28 March 1990, Wireless File. John Sedlins's wireless message was based on a hearing held by the Africa Subcommittee of the U.S. Senate on 28 March 1990.

vehicles and distribution points...."⁷⁸

The Reagan administration should have been aware that neither side in the civil conflict in Ethiopia was willing to make peace before an unconditional victory. The EPLF and TPLF, Ethiopia's largest insurgent groups, had by March 1989 made significant military gains against the government. They virtually controlled northern Ethiopia and the gateway to Ethiopia's seaports. In the domestic struggle for power, all warring parties placed their military objectives above the needs of the people and pursued aid with a view to enhancing their military capabilities. Their military strategies continued to hurt food production and made food distribution more difficult. The mass deaths from starvation which resulted from the commitment to total victory by the Government and its armed opponents, and their integration of agricultural policies into their war strategies, deepened the humanitarian crisis which American policymakers faced in Ethiopia.

⁷⁸ Embassy of the United States of America to Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, "Economic Sanctions Against Ethiopia," 12 October 1988, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Addis Ababa

Conclusion

The United States had granted aid for agricultural development as well as for famine relief to Ethiopia during the Haile Sellassie period. During the Revolutionary period, the United States limited its assistance to famine relief and work projects associated with the relief of famine. In the eyes of the United States, the violation of the human rights of peasants by the Revolutionary Government made it the wrong messenger to carry the message of agricultural development and social justice.

The Ethiopian Government also suffered the consequences of poor timing. Congressional opinion had forced human rights and democratization onto the centre-stage of U.S. foreign policy at the time the PMAC took power in Ethiopia. The new American emphasis on democratization and respect for human rights threatened the hegemony of the PMAC. Collectivization of agriculture and control of peasants from above were vital to its grasp on power. These Ethiopian policies were at variance with the American policy of "stay[ing] alert to violations of human rights in all U.S. aid recipient countries." But in pursuing a human rights foreign policy, the United States was often constrained to act within the framework of the agricultural strategies of the Ethiopian government.

The seeds and tools which the United States gave to peasant associations to improve resettlement programmes in

Ethiopia did not constitute an endorsement of the Revolutionary Government and its revolutionary policies. They served rather as means of maintaining a communication channel between Washington and Addis Ababa. Through that channel, the United States hoped to influence the direction of Ethiopian policy, help poor peasants directly and promote human rights.⁷⁹ The extent to which the United States succeeded or failed in accomplishing its objectives in post-Imperial Ethiopia is further explored in chapters seven and eight.

⁷⁹ See Opening Statement of Senator Dick Clark (D-Iowa), Chairman of the Subcommittee, in Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, 4-6 August 1976, 3, and also Raymond W. Copson and Alan K. Yu, "Ethiopia: U.S. Foreign Assistance Facts," updated, 8 February 1989, pp. 1, 11.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FAMINE, WAR AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN REVOLUTIONARY ETHIOPIA, 1975-1991

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food....

Article 25 of the International Bill
of Human Rights, 10 December 1948

Why should people have a right to be fed when they won't listen to what we tell them is best for them? The people have an obligation to obey programmes and policies designed for their own benefit. If they think they have a right to wage war on us, why don't we have the right to stop it and to move them to areas where they [will] have less chance of rebelling?

Statement attributed to Mengistu
Haile Mariam in Dawit Wolde Giorgis,
Red Tears

The Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia (PMGSE) showed more eagerness than the Imperial Ethiopian Government (IEG) to deal with the intractable problem of famine in Ethiopia. It made a determined effort to reform the semi-feudal land tenure system and to improve the mechanisms for delivering famine-relief assistance. Yet, the Government possessed neither the vision nor the competence to avoid the convergence of war and famine or to reconcile its political survival with the public welfare after it assumed political power in September 1974. This chapter discusses why having failed to prevent famine through its agricultural policies, the Revolutionary Government could also not prevent famine from degenerating into mass death. It further examines

the atmosphere in which it mobilized domestic and external resources to mitigate the pace of death from starvation. The discussion concludes with an examination of the argument advanced by the American Congress, journalists and human rights organizations that the Revolutionary Government used famine and starvation as instruments for perpetrating genocide.

Rethinking Famine-Relief and Setting New Priorities, 1975-1977

The PMGSE showed an initial determination to eradicate famine in Ethiopia by making its recurrence after 1974 a political crime. That injunction in the Government's penal code of 16 November 1974, was certainly the most revolutionary of its efforts to reorder attitudes towards famine after it deposed Emperor Haile Sellassie on 12 September 1974 for failing to prevent famine from developing into mass death. In 1974, many Ethiopians realized that while emergency relief aid saved lives during the famines of the Imperial period, it did not become a sustainable solution to a cyclical problem.¹ In a country where few alternatives to agriculture existed as a means of livelihood, and where the agrarian economy remained susceptible to droughts, using foreign aid for economic development and making people "self-sufficient" appealed to

¹ Melaku Ayalew, "Food Security and Response to Famine: The Role of the International Community," Paper Presented At the *Symposium on Famine in Ethiopia: Learning From the Past to Prepare For the Present*, Africa Hall, Addis Ababa, 15-18 March 1995, p.9.

the new regime as the most appropriate way of eradicating famine.²

Mass death from starvation in 1974 helped to reform the attitude of the Ethiopian state towards famine even before the PMGSE usurped power. The last Imperial cabinet under Mikael Imru made the first move to reconstitute the national relief committee, which the Emperor had appointed in April 1974 to respond to nationwide starvation, into a new Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC). That act on 29 August 1974 by the Imru cabinet put relief assistance firmly in the domain of state responsibilities and gave the RRC the mandate to prevent famine from degenerating into mass death in Ethiopia.

Prime Minister Mikael Imru put the RRC under the leadership of one of Ethiopia's most respected civil servants, the former Ambassador to India, Shimelis Adugna. The Imperial cabinet, which operated under the threat of a creeping coup, hoped to use the experience of the Commissioner in international affairs to secure the cooperation of the international community in seeking an enduring solution to famine in Ethiopia. Commissioner Shimelis was widely respected by the United Nations agencies in Addis Ababa as well as the American Embassy.³ He hoped to sustain the international

² See Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia, p.282.

³ See John M. Saunders, Assistant Administrator and Regional Representative of the UNDP office in Addis Ababa, to Michel Doo Kingue, Assistant Administrator and Regional Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa, UNDP, New York,

sympathy towards the victims of the famine of 1974 to accumulate emergency relief food and use it as payment for work on roads, dams and irrigation projects to prevent future famines.⁴

Although it was the last Imperial cabinet which put relief aid in the domain of public policy, it was the Revolutionary Government which improved the capacity of the RRC to function. Soon after it assumed power, the military council extended the mandate of the RRC beyond mobilizing and distributing relief aid to designing and implementing development projects aimed at rehabilitating people affected by famine. By permitting the RRC to undertake part of the functions of the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) to resettle people on underutilized, but fertile lands, the PMGSE integrated the famine-relief activities of the RRC into the development programmes which the Revolutionary state designed to avert mass death.⁵ The new government sought and received the support of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in 1975 to identify fertile lands for a national resettlement

Personal and Confidential, "Drought Relief in Ethiopia," 31 March 1976, WFP Archives, Addis Ababa, UNDP File.

⁴ Shimelis Adugna, ex-Commissioner of the RRC, "The Role of Donors and NGOS in Relief and Development," Paper Presented at the Regional Workshop on *Lessons Learnt and Future Development Priorities and Strategies: Ten Years after the 1984-85 Famine*," Awassa, Ethiopia, 27 February 1995, p.13.

⁵ See RRC, "Drought: RRC Activities and International Donors," June 1983, RRC Documentation Centre, Addis Ababa, pp.2-3.

programme. In fact the Revolutionary Government viewed resettlement not only as a long-term solution to famine in rural Ethiopia but also as a means of providing the unemployed in urban areas and Ethiopia's nomadic population with an alternative livelihood in agriculture.⁶

Besides its long-term plans to mitigate the lethal effects of an intractable problem, the Government also equipped the RRC with a capacity to predict famine before it occurred or developed into mass starvation. In January 1977, using national funds and money obtained from the American government, as well as international bodies, the Government purchased mobile radio equipment to help the RRC facilitate communication between its headquarters in Addis Ababa and the members of its field staff who monitored crop conditions in remote parts of the country. State assistance for the enlargement of the RRC's fleet of vehicles went in tandem with the mobilization of domestic and external funds to redress the problems of food storage. By 1984, the Revolutionary Government had constructed 353 warehouses and 112 silos, capable of holding 353,869 metric tonnes of food, throughout Ethiopia. Furthermore, it built silos capable of holding 116,345 metric tonnes of food in twelve awrajas (sub-

⁶ CRDA, "Minutes of the 98th General Meeting," 1 December 1975, CRDA Archives Department, Addis Ababa, File: 1975.

districts) in Wollo, the region most vulnerable to drought-induced famine.⁷

The Government went beyond the establishment of a-famine-early-warning system to seeking a new way to prevent some of the problems that aggravated famine in the Imperial period. Delays in international responses to national appeals for food and the ninety day lead time required, in most cases, for the delivery of approved donations often prevented a timely intervention to save lives and prevent migration of the hungry. As we observed in our discussion of famine in the Imperial period in chapter three, migration of the hungry to other areas in search of food often strained the food situation in the receiving areas and precipitated conflict between migrants and local inhabitants. To prevent these developments the PMGSE tried but failed to implement a proposal which a food assessment team from the World Food Programme (WFP) and the FAO made to the Imperial Government at the height of famine in 1974. The team which visited Ethiopia recommended that Ethiopia should maintain 180,000 metric tons of food as a buffer stock to relieve the most vulnerable to famines before they migrated or needed to be rescued by a major relief operation.⁸ The lack of support which the Revolutionary Government received for the food security

⁷ Shimelis Adugna, "The Role of Donors and NGOs in Relief and Development," p.5.

⁸ Ibid.

reserve plan from many donors, including the United States, as we shall observe in chapter eight, lowered the stocks of food that the RRC was able to stockpile as an additional safeguard.

Predicting Famine and Estimating Relief Needs

The extent to which the RRC acted as an agent of-famine-prevention in the new Ethiopia depended on its ability to assess the national food situation. With its hypothesis that rainfall constituted the principal variable for food production in a rain-fed agrarian economy, the RRC estimated the probable effects of crop failure by assessing the quantity of food that peasants could produce in a good or a poor rainy season and the availability of reserves from previous harvests. It also monitored the prices of food items on local markets based on the premise that "if crop conditions [were] normal, prices [would] naturally fall...."⁹ Under that assumption, RRC field workers collected information on the quantity of livestock and other rural assets that people possessed which, in the event of famine, could be sold on the market to purchase food. Within the parameters of these indices, the RRC classified as surplus areas, *woredas* (districts) that produced above their consumption requirements and still retained enough seeds to begin another crop year. It categorized as "sufficient," districts which harvested enough

⁹ CRDA, "Minutes of the 152nd General Meeting," 14 January 1980, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, File: 1980.

food and had sufficient seeds for the next planting season.¹⁰

Districts and sub-districts which produced only enough for consumption, but had very little seed reserves for planting, were rated as producing below requirement. If a sub-district had only enough seeds, but lost all its crops during the harvest season, it was declared a potential disaster area. If crops in a given area failed, and its peasants neither had food from previous harvests nor possessed enough livestock to sell, the people concerned were deemed at risk of starvation. Like the Imperial Government, the Revolutionary Government took the migration of the hungry into other areas or the gathering of people along the roadside as concrete indicators of a food crisis.¹¹

Notwithstanding the sophisticated methods it devised to forecast famine, the ability of the RRC to accomplish its objective depended on the assistance it received from the Government and other state institutions. As the national institution mandated to prevent lethal famine, the RRC looked to several government institutions to adequately report on rainfall distribution, market prices and rural assets. To enhance the capacity of its famine early-warning system, the

¹⁰ Ahmed Ali, Head of the Department of Aid Coordination and International Relations of the RRC, "Prediction of Food Shortages and the Response System of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission," Paper Presented to the Workshop on Drought in Kenya Organized by the National Environment Secretariat, Addis Ababa, May 1986, Draft Version, p.18.

¹¹ Ibid.

RRC depended on the National Meteorological Services Agency (NMSA) for weather reports. It also hoped to receive accurate and timely reports on crop and market conditions from the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) to complement reports on crop and livestock conditions which it received from the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA). The MOA also shared the rehabilitation functions of the RRC while the Maritime Transport Services Corporation (MTSC), and the National Transport Corporation (NATRACOR) were expected to clear RRC food consignments from the ports and deliver them to RRC warehouses throughout the country.¹²

In the absence of a viable national food security reserve, the Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC) acted as a buffer for the RRC. The AMC bought and stored grain from surplus regions and often released some of its reserved stocks for its own and RRC relief activities. It also provided the RRC with information on food prices in the areas in which it operated. As the national marketing corporation, the AMC sold, on behalf of the RRC, food which donors offered to the RRC to be sold to finance relief and rehabilitation programmes in the country.¹³ Collective information gathering and cooperative

¹² The RRC was expected to pay, in advance, half of the cost of port handling, storage and delivery of its food consignments to the MTSC before the latter performed any of these duties for the RRC. See Peter Cutler and Robin Stephenson, "The State of Food Emergency Preparedness in Ethiopia," p.14.

¹³ Ibid.

relief activities constituted an improvement upon the inefficient bureaucracy of the Imperial regime. However, they did not guarantee cooperation and free sharing of information within the post-Imperial civil service. Conflict and competition between government institutions continued.

Relations between the RRC and other state institutions became even more complicated when they competed for funds for overlapping functions. Since funding for the RRC was never fully guaranteed, it competed with other organizations for government and foreign funds. In the process, the RRC clashed with the MOA which also undertook rehabilitation activities through its extensive food for work programmes. The MOA also regarded the RRC's resettlement function as its institutional prerogative. In the complex chain of information gathering and dissemination, the RRC also relied on the reports which local officials and leaders of peasant associations provided to the district supervisors of the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) about rural conditions. But, the CSO treated its data on crops as classified information and often showed unwillingness to share it with the RRC or to release it to other government departments.¹⁴

On the other hand, the AMC, which had a complementary relief function, limited its food distribution activities to urban areas especially the capital, Addis Ababa. Through state

¹⁴ Peter Cutler and Robin Stephenson, "The State of Food Emergency Preparedness in Ethiopia," pp. 16, 31.

compulsion and its arrangements with the RRC, the AMC used some of the RRC's relief consignments to stabilize the urban food supply to prevent urban hunger from precipitating political insurrection. However, the AMC acted as a buffer for the RRC only when it had assurances that the RRC would replace the borrowed food from its food donations.¹⁵

One of the depressing consequences of the civil wars in the post-Imperial civil service was the transport of food from the regions to the capital by the AMC and the subsequent re-shipment of much of the same food back to the regions by the RRC. This wasteful system of food distribution, which often aggravated hunger, persisted because the RRC and the AMC saw themselves as separate institutions with different mandates in a new political setting in which failure to perform one's obligation to prevent famine could have dire consequences.

The problems which the RRC encountered affected its ability to identify and relieve famine conditions. Tensions between the RRC and the MOA and the AMC often led to open disagreements and contradictory statements from each on harvest prospects and the level of food supplies in the

¹⁵ At the height of famine in August 1985, the AMC still owed the RRC 16,634 metric tonnes of wheat that the RRC loaned to it from its fledgling food security reserve. It was through such arrangements with the AMC, and other domestic and foreign NGOs, that the RRC failed to adequately account for foreign food donations. See RRC Food Security Reserve, "Minutes of the Technical Meeting of the FSR [Food Security Reserve] held on 12 August 1985," RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, Food Security Reserve Project File No. P27/14.

country.¹⁶ There was also disagreement on relief priorities and insufficient coordination between the RRC and its domestic food distribution partners, the MTSC and the NATRACOR.¹⁷ Above all, the fact that only twenty weather stations, out of over a thousand in Ethiopia, reported regularly to the NMSA signified the magnitude of the conflicts within the civil service.¹⁸

The RRC made tremendous efforts to fulfil its mandate, but its ability to prevent famine or mitigate its lethal consequences was further ensnared by the exigencies of war. When the domestic struggle for power intensified in 1977, state security forces controlled all radio communication in Ethiopia. The Ministry of Public Security confiscated the mobile radios which USAID-E and RRC field workers used to communicate vital information on crops, market and weather conditions as well as famine-induced migrations.¹⁹ The

¹⁶ Peter Cutler and Robin Stephenson have observed that optimistic estimates of crop performance and procurement given to the FAO and WFP crop assessment teams by the AMC, in February 1984, which were later found to be inaccurate, led them to underestimate the food assistance that Ethiopia required for 1984. See Peter Cutler and Robin Stephenson, "The State of Food Emergency Preparedness in Ethiopia," pp.17-18.

¹⁷ For more information on the disagreements between the RRC, the MTSC, NATRACOR and the MOA on priorities, see "Report of the United Nations Working Group on Relief Assistance," undated, WFP Archives, Addis Ababa, File: Incoming Cables, April-July 1985.

¹⁸ Peter Cutler and Robin Stephenson, "The State of Food Emergency Preparedness in Ethiopia," p.17.

¹⁹ See Kenneth H. Sharper, Acting Director, USAID Mission to Ethiopia, to Ato Zegeye Asfaw, Minister of Agriculture and

Government seized the radios as a result of its paranoia that they might be used to communicate vital security information to anti-government groups. Like the Imperial Government, agents of the Revolutionary Government prevented the hungry from gathering along the roads or moving into urban areas to register their plight. These indicators of a food crisis embarrassed a Government that had seized power with the promise of eradicating famine and had passed a penal code making the incidence of famine after Haile Sellassie a political crime. Consequently, the RRC's famine early warning system failed to note the development of famine in many parts of the country and noticed it only when it developed into mass starvation.²⁰

Even when the RRC obtained sufficient accurate information about famine, it could not ensure that its relief assistance went to those who genuinely needed it. Peasant associations were expected to select people affected by famine for state relief assistance on the basis of lost agricultural produce, quantity of livestock and the number of their dependents. The heads of the families of selected beneficiaries received cards which affirmed their eligibility for monthly food rations. Nevertheless, the procedure for

Settlement, Addis Ababa, 24 August 1978. RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/19 "USA Report."

²⁰ Peter Cutler and Robin Stephenson, "The State of Food Emergency Preparedness in Ethiopia," p.17.

assessing needs was not always followed.²¹ Many peasant associations either wrongfully underestimated or intentionally inflated the number of potential beneficiaries and the population of disaster areas. In many cases, the lists of beneficiaries included the dead, absentee relatives, brewers, storekeepers and other people who had sufficient economic ability to buy food from the markets.²²

Dependence on the peasant associations and *woreda* relief committees to select beneficiaries of state assistance drew the RRC into local politics, which hampered its efforts to identify the needy. In some areas, the authority to issue cards was misused by officials to maintain allegiance to the Revolutionary Government. In some of these instances, cards were issued only to members of peasant associations and taxpayers who could provide receipts.²³ Many peasants also developed their own tactical responses to the widespread abuses in the determination of relief beneficiaries in their districts. Peasants sometimes exaggerated their plight,

²¹ Ahmed Ali, "Prediction of Food Shortages and the Response System of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission," pp.13-14; Author's tape interview with peasants and ex-members of peasant associations at resettlement village no. 23, Pawe, East Gojjam, 1 October 1995.

²² Author's tape interviews with peasants and relief recipients at Wegel-Tena, Delanta *woreda*, North Wollo Administrative Zone, 14 October 1995 and with Mulatu Teshome, ex-member of the *woreda* committee, Mertuley-Maryam, East Gojjam, 5 October 1995.

²³ Solomon Inquai, "Reflections on the 1984-85 Famine," pp.2-3.

refused to cooperate with food assessment teams in the collection of data on rural conditions or refused to seek aid thereby worsening their plight.²⁴

The New Relief Mechanism in Action, 1977-82

Purchases of food from surplus districts in Shoa, Arsi, Gojjam and Gonder enabled the Government to prevent starvation in Wollo, Tigray and Eritrea, in northern Ethiopia, in 1975 and 1976.²⁵ But the spread of famine from northern Ethiopia to other regions during the invasion of Ethiopia by Somalia, which lasted from July 1977 to March 1978, and the intensification of the war between the Government and armed insurgent groups, severely tested the RRC's capabilities. The invasion of eastern Ethiopia by Somalia displaced many people in Hararghe and Bale, in the southeast. In the course of the war, the Western Somalia Liberation Front (WSLF) seized-Dire-Dawa, the capital of the Hararghe administrative region and the town through which Ethiopia's only rail road to Djibouti passed. The insurgent group used its strategic occupation of Dire-Dawa to hamper rail-transport of food from Djibouti to

²⁴ Author's tape interviews with peasants and relief recipients at Wegel-Tena, Delanta woreda, North Wollo Administrative Zone, 14 October 1995 and with eight ex-relief workers at Bati, North Wollo Administrative Region, 16 October 1995.

²⁵ UNDP, "Summary of A Meeting Held in the UNDP Conference Room With Mr. P.C. Stanissis, Special Advisor to the League of Red Cross Societies, and Mr. Brian Wickland, UNDRO," March 9, 1976, Addis Ababa, World Food Programme Archives, File: United Nations Development Programme.

Ethiopia. Its depredations, and those of the Somali forces, created acute starvation conditions in southeastern Ethiopia and disrupted the resettlement projects which the Government first developed in the region in 1975.²⁶

As we observed in chapter five, Somalia's attack on Ethiopia and the depredations of the WSLF in Dire-Dawa in 1977 and 1978 obscured military campaigns against the Government in Tigray by the TPLF and in Eritrea by the EPLF. To consolidate their hold on the towns and villages they occupied, to sustain their armed opposition to the Government and to weaken state control over their regions, the liberation fronts established parallel relief institutions.

The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) had established its own relief organization, the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) in 1975 and stepped up its solicitation of relief resources from abroad. To consolidate itself and to "provide relief and development assistance in...areas of Tigray" under its control, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) founded the Relief Society of Tigray (REST), in 1978.²⁷ Similarly, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) established the Oromo Relief Association in 1979. The relief associations of the insurgent groups competed with the state relief organ,

²⁶ CRDA, "Minutes of the 131st General Meeting," 3 April 1978; "Minutes of the 139th General Meeting," 4 December 1978, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, File:1978.

²⁷ Relief Society of Tigray, "1991/92 Report," Addis Ababa: Bole Press, 1992.

the RRC, for international food relief resources. Their parallel and competing activities in the field of relief mirrored the struggle over power and ethnic-self-determination between the TPLF, EPLF and OLF, on one hand, and the Revolutionary Government on the other. The TPLF and EPLF not only cooperated in their war against the Government but also in their quest to overcome dependence on state food relief avenues.²⁸

The ability of the RRC to function effectively was severely reduced as the Revolutionary Government became preoccupied with its own political survival in 1977, as well as the potential threat to the unity of Ethiopia that it vowed to protect. The civil war accentuated famine and created an insecure atmosphere in which famine gradually degenerated into mass starvation, while the RRC gradually lost its state of readiness to detect and fight it. In the volatile atmosphere of war three parallel systems of relieving famine and starvation emerged in Ethiopia. The first, shelter feeding, provided prepared food and medical attention for highly malnourished children, the old, the weak, pregnant women and nursing mothers. In the second type of famine-relief, able beneficiaries received uncooked food (dry rations) and other

²⁸ Author's tape interview with Tekliwoini Assefa, Head of the Relief Society of Tigray and a former TPLF soldier, Addis Ababa, 30 January 1995.

relief items and took them to their homes.²⁹ This was the relief system which the revolutionary government favoured when the threat to its survival became apparent because it reduced the need for shelter feeding, which fostered attitudes of dependency and often created havens for anti-government propaganda.

The third relief activity, the Cross Border Operation (CBO), was started in 1977 as an unofficial and discreet famine-relief operation by Norwegian Church Aid and the American Lutheran World Federation with the support of the USAID Mission to Sudan. The CBO provided food, medicine and other relief items through the neighbouring Republic of Sudan to the west of Ethiopia, where relief supplies were distributed to the hungry in areas under the control of the TPLF and EPLF in Tigray and Eritrea.³⁰

Insecurity, state security measures and competition with anti-Government relief organizations frustrated the ability of the RRC to undertake relief activities in certain regions. The RRC could not immediately bring relief food to the estimated

²⁹ Ahmed Ali, Head of the Department of Aid Coordination and International Relations of the RRC, "Prediction of Food Shortages and the Response System of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission," p.17.

³⁰ For a detailed discussion of the Cross-Border Operation, see Mark Duffield and John Prendergast, Without Troops and Tanks, pp.45-74; Barbara Hendrie, "Relief Aid Behind the Lines: The Cross-Border Operation in Tigray," in Joanna Macrae and Anthony Zwi, War and Hunger: Rethinking International Responses to Complex Emergencies (London & New Jersey: Zed Books, 1994), pp. 125-138.

100,000 people who were deemed at risk of starvation in Illubabor administrative region, in south-western Ethiopia, where the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) operated. The failure to provide "immediate relief" to the hungry in Buno awraja in Illubabor, because of attacks on food trucks by the OLF, led to the reported deaths of about 170 people from needless starvation in August 1978.³¹ When the government closed the road from Addis Ababa to Eritrea as it prepared to launch a major military operation to regain control over northern Ethiopia, which it had lost to the TPLF and EPLF in the course of the war against Somalia, the RRC could not gain access to the quantities of food that it had in its warehouses at Assab port. The RRC could not mount relief activities in any part of northern Ethiopia for many months in 1978.

After 1978, state responses to famine oscillated between occasional support of the RRC's relief activities and deliberate obstruction of them. The fact that RRC famine warning reports circulated to government officials failed to elicit immediate state responses to a looming disaster demonstrated the changing priorities of the government.³² The political and military situation in the country made the preservation of the unity of Ethiopia more significant than

³¹ CRDA, "Minutes of the 134th General Meeting," 3 July 1978; "Minutes of 135th General Meeting," 7 August 1978, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, File: 1978.

³² Melaku Ayalew, "Food Security and Response to Famine," p.7.

the relief of famine in government policy. Fear for their lives in a political culture in which execution was the consequence of political defeat made members of the Revolutionary Government see the manipulation of famine and relief assistance as viable military tools. But the Government sought in famine and state control of relief assistance, mechanisms to preserve itself and the unity of the state rather than to completely exterminate its opponents. On occasion, it adopted some of the most reprehensible strategies of the old Imperial Government by suppressing RRC publicity about famine and censoring national media coverage of starvation to limit domestic and international sympathy for the starving in areas outside its control. The object was not to starve them to death, but to create conditions that would force the hungry to move into government relief centres.³³

Where the government actively supported RRC relief efforts, the inherent flaws of its security policies impeded the ability of the RRC to relieve starvation.³⁴ Under a politically-manipulated transportation system, the port of Assab, in Eritrea, and Bale administrative region, in

³³ Author's tape interview with Amhara and Oromo resettles in resettlement villages 14 and 23, Pawe, East Gojjam, 1 October 1995.

³⁴ CRDA, "139th General Meeting, 4 December 1978, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, File: 1978; Frederick L. Chapin, Ambassador, U.S. Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Secretary of State, Telegram No. 5253, "PL 480 Title II Emergency Request for Bale/Sidamo," 15 December 1978. RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. I.

southeastern Ethiopia, fell into different *ketena* or transportation zones. Relief food for Bale was transported to a warehouse in Nazareth, in central Ethiopia. It was from Nazareth that food for Bale was reloaded onto lorries of the appropriate *ketena* and shipped to the region.³⁵ It is probable that since the WSLF and OLF controlled vast areas of Bale, the Government's transportation arrangement was designed to permit inspection of all relief cargo leaving Assab port for Bale.

While over 100,000 people starved in Bale in 1978, about 2,000 metric tons of World Food Program relief food earmarked for Bale stayed in the central government warehouse in Nazareth awaiting the allocation of the appropriate *ketena* transport.³⁶ Of the seven RRC vehicles assigned to serve-one-hundred and forty-five rehabilitation camps in Bale, only four were in good condition by December 1978. In the atmosphere of war and insecurity, safety concerns made many drivers and private transport owners unwilling to place themselves and their vehicles in the line of fire. Consequently, the available food at ports and in RRC and government warehouses, as well as in regions that produced surpluses, could not be rapidly and safely transported to places where food needs were critical, but insecurity was rampant in 1978.

³⁵ CRDA, "Minutes of the 131st General Meeting," 3 April 1978; "Minutes of the 139th General Meeting," 4 December 1978, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, File:1978.

³⁶ CRDA, "Minutes of the 137th General Meeting," 2 October 1978, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, File: 1978.

Hunger in the context of war spared neither the rich nor the poor. The prolonged closure of Massawa, Ethiopia's second and largest port, situated in the Eritrea administrative region, stopped many factories that imported raw materials through the port from functioning effectively. The port could not function effectively throughout 1978 because of a prolonged military struggle over the control of it between the Revolutionary Government and the EPLF. The closure of those factories weakened the ability of many factory wage-earners in Eritrea to buy food. A survey conducted by the *kebeles* (urban dwellers associations) in Massawa, and Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, in 1978, found about "100,000 people without any income" and "60,000 with income less than 50 Birr per month."³⁷ Disruptions in the means of income generation and the mechanisms of food acquisition affected not only the poor but also the ability of even the rich to import food or obtain adequate nourishment in the market. The warring parties did not seek a peaceful means to re-open the port and the road from Addis Ababa to Asmara. Instead the Government chose to airlift food to the hungry in Eritrea. Beneath the tranquil surface of that humanitarianism lay the strategic object of re-asserting state control over famine-relief operations in northern Ethiopia and in the secessionist region of Eritrea.³⁸

³⁷ CRDA, "Minutes of the 135th Meeting," 7 August 1978, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, File: 1978.

³⁸ CRDA, 'Minutes of 133rd General Meeting," 5 June 1978, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, File: 1978.

Due to the increasing international disaffection with the Government and the successful propaganda of its Ethiopian adversaries living abroad, the Revolutionary Government could not rapidly acquire the needed aircraft and the relief materials for its air-relief operation. It could not bring to the country a C-47 airplane it bought from Australia because, the RRC lamented, some countries refused to grant the aircraft landing rights to refuel.³⁹ Although it permitted non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to complement its airlift operations, which it started with Ministry of Defence transport planes, it imposed restrictions on their humanitarian access to Eritrea. The NGOs could only operate with government clearance, using aircraft clearly identified as relief planes and carrying relief cargoes inspected by state security forces.⁴⁰ It was when the strategic benefits of the airlift operation incurred enormous economic costs, especially for aviation fuel, that the Government re-opened the road from Addis Ababa to Asmara in November 1978 when the government regained control over pockets of northern Ethiopia.

By August 1978, crops in many parts of Ethiopia had been damaged by a variety of natural and man-made disasters. Inadequate rainfall in some areas, and excessive rain in others, frost, livestock epidemics and locust attacks

³⁹ CRDA, "Minutes of the 130th General Meeting," 6 March 1978, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, File: 1978.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

compounded the starvation conditions in Eritrea, Tigray, Wollo and Gondar, in northern Ethiopia, as well as Shoa, in central Ethiopia, Hararghe in the south-east, Gojjam in the west and Gamo-Goffa in the south-west.⁴¹ Shortages of fertilizer caused by slow offloading and transportation of imported fertilizer at the ports and the outbreak of livestock diseases limited the efforts of peasants to grow food. With little or no food reserves from their previous harvests, many farmers in Wollo sold their livestock "at a fraction of [the] normal price" to buy expensive but poor quality food in their local markets.⁴²

Crop failure, high food prices, malnutrition, lack of water, war-induced insecurity and abduction of peasants by marauding soldiers for militia service forced many peasants to resort to desperate survival strategies. Many people in Lasta, Lalibela, Wadla-Delanta, Werehimanu and Gozo-Belay awrajas, in western Wollo, unknowingly or desperately consumed grains that had been infected by fungus. Many people who ate them contracted *ergotism*, a debilitating disease caused by the consumption of fungus-infected grains. *Ergotism* reached a virulent stage in Wollo, in April 1978, causing farmers in the affected districts to abandon their crops in the field. These incidents also cast clouds of suspicion over food grains that

⁴¹ CRDA, "Minutes of the 134th General Meeting," 3 July 1978; "Minutes of the 135th General Meeting," 7 August 1978, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, File: 1978.

⁴² CRDA, "Minutes of the 131st General Meeting," 3 April 1978, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, File: 1978.

appeared on the markets in Wollo or were thought to have originated there. As a result of the constraints it faced in obtaining information, the RRC could not identify the outbreak early enough to prevent it from spreading or killing many people and farm animals.⁴³

With their ability to produce and purchase more food substantially reduced, and gripped by fear of contracting *ergotism* by eating local wheat, barley and *gench* from the market, many peasants in Wollo looked to "the food from Shoa" for survival.⁴⁴ Notwithstanding the fact that its war efforts accentuated the natural factors that sustained famine, and in spite of the successive crop failures and worsening starvation conditions in 1978, the government continued to ask peasants to fulfil their required food delivery quotas to the state. Those who did not have farm produce to pay these quotas sold

⁴³ The *ergot* disease was reported in four administrative regions: Wollo, Tigray, Bale and Arsi. Once a person suffered from "ergotism," amputation of the affected gangrous part was necessary to prevent death. Destruction of infected crops, and fallowing of the land for about one year, appeared as the best way to stop the disease from spreading. See CRDA, "Minutes of the 132nd General Meeting," 2 May 1978; "Minutes of the 138th General Meeting," 6 November 1978, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, File: 1978 and also "Minutes of the 153rd General Meeting," 4 February 1980, File: 1980.

⁴⁴ Peasants had a variety of names for relief foods. Since the RRC brought them from Addis Ababa, they acquired the designation, "food from Shoa" [i.e. Addis Ababa] or "Canada wheat," "America," or "EEC" according to people's ability to read the logos and labels that adorned food bags and oil cans. Many of the farmers the author interviewed in the towns of Kutaber, Mersa, Wegel-Tena, and Bati, in Wollo administrative region, recalled vividly the outbreak of the *ergot* disease in 1977-78. Many traced its origins to April 1977.

their relief rations to purchase the required teff or sorghum from the markets, or handed large portions of their relief food to the AMC to fulfil their food quota obligations and avoid reprisals from peasant associations or woreda committees.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the government nudged the RRC to loan some of its relief food to the AMC to stabilize the food supply in Addis Ababa.

While the RRC blamed starvation in 1978 and 1979 on drought and the war against Somalia, it never directly mentioned the impact of state extractions of food from farmers as causes of starvation in its numerous food requests to foreign governments and international agencies. When they linked famine to the civil war, the RRC and senior government officials blamed it solely on the activities of the EPLF, TPLF and other anti-government insurgent groups.⁴⁶ As we observed in chapter five, the agricultural policies which the EPLF and TPLF implemented in the areas they controlled were not

⁴⁵ Author's tape interview with farmers and ex-peasant association leaders at Kutaber, North Wollo Administrative Zone, 20 October 1995.

⁴⁶ See Shimelis Adugna to Michael Sellers, AID Affairs Officer, Addis Ababa, 30 July 1982, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 2.; Col. Ayenachew Habte-Mariam, Deputy Commissioner of the RRC, to Ethiopian Representative at the United Nations, 5 May 1983, RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 2.; Taye Gurmu, Deputy Commissioner of the RRC, to Brother Augustine O'Keefe, Coordinator of the Christian Relief and Development Agency, Addis Ababa, 26 September 1984, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, RRC File: January-April 1985 and also Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, "Interview With Ethiopia's Head of State," 27 February 1985, World Food Programme Archives, Addis Ababa, Incoming Cables, April-July 1985.

different from the socialist measures which the government enforced. Like the government, they pursued a total victory objective, mined roads, attacked relief convoys and deliberately created situations which forced many peasants to depend on their relief networks apart from recruiting many of them as their soldiers.⁴⁷ These contributions of anti-Government groups to starvation should not have obscured the fact that as internal security problems intensified, and famine deepened, the Government gave preference to ships carrying military hardware for its use over those carrying relief food for the people in whose name it claimed to be fighting.⁴⁸

The pace of death from starvation in Revolutionary Ethiopia also depended on the rapid discharge of relief cargo from the ports. Undoubtedly, the physical layout of Ethiopia's ports, their old cargo handling equipment and limited storage spaces, hampered the rapid discharge and delivery of relief cargo.⁴⁹ The closure of Massawa port for a long period in 1978 put an additional strain on the capacity of the much smaller port at Assab. Consequently, congestion at the port exposed

⁴⁷ CRDA, "Minutes of the 135th General Meeting," 7 August 1978, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, File: 1978

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Massawa port could take only vessels with a draft not exceeding 28 ft. This hampered quicker anchorage of larger ships that carried relief food.

large quantities of relief food to spoilage.⁵⁰ As hunger developed into widespread starvation in 1979, 86,000 metric tons of wheat from the Belgian government lay exposed to heat for several weeks at the port because the warehouses and stacking areas were filled with coffee for export, unclaimed imported cargo, fertiliser and relief food waiting to be transported from the port.⁵¹ The slow offloading rate prevented the speedy transportation of fertilizer and insecticides to farmers thereby pushing hunger and malnutrition gradually over the edge.

Equally important, bureaucratic politics which ensnared information gathering also complicated the port congestion. Assab port authorities blamed the congestion on insufficient information provided by food donors and relief agencies about relief shipments and distribution plans. Admittedly, the independence which international relief agencies exercised in their relief plans made it difficult for port authorities or the RRC to coordinate the arrival of relief ships. Moreover, the RRC often failed to provide delivery orders for its relief consignments at the appropriate time. As a result, thousands of spare tires which the RRC required to rehabilitate its fleet of vehicles to transport food to the needy remained at

⁵⁰ CRDA, "Minutes of the 130th General Meeting," 6 March 1978, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, File: 1978.

⁵¹ Alan Davis, Regional Food Monitor, REDSO/EA and Ephrem Hagos, USAID-E, "Assab Port-Status Report," 8 May 1979. RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/27 "USA Agreements".

Assab port for long periods.⁵²

Assab port had a clearance procedure that allowed various forwarders to cart relief consignments from the ports on the basis of contract bids. In 1977, the Ethiopia Amalgamated Company (EAC) won the contract to forward a consignment of 6,343 MT of American Title II wheat on board the *SS Lee*. The EAC delayed in forwarding the consignment from the port. Some of the wheat perished because the consignment was "haphazardly covered" with very old and partly torn tarpaulins. According to the port manager, Ato Makonnen, the consignee (RRC) was responsible for providing tarpaulins for its consignments, but failed to do so. In another instance, the Maritime Transport Services Corporation (MTSC) which won the bid to transport 3,705 MT of American Title II wheat, on board the *SS Thomas Nelson*, refused to take custody of the consignment "because of back-payment problems. . . with the RRC."⁵³

According to the Assab branch manager of the MTSC, Ato Zegeye, the RRC owed the MTSC "about seven million Birr [US\$3.4m] which ha[d] accumulated over the past eight months." The MTSC, therefore, refused to provide its money for delivery orders and other payments until the RRC had reimbursed it for

⁵² Informal Coordinating Committee of Bilateral Donors, "Minutes of Meeting Held on 30 May 1985," WFP Archives, Addis Ababa, Incoming Cables: April 1985-July 1985.

⁵³ Alan Davis, Regional Food Monitor, REDSO/EA and Ephrem Hagos, USAID/E, "Assab Port-Status Report", 8 May 1979. RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/27 "USA Agreements."

previous bills.⁵⁴ What made the feud between the RRC and the MTSC deeply troubling was that the Government knew about it, but did not act to resolve it. It only ordered the MTSC to prioritize the transportation of RRC relief consignments in September 1984, when mass death from starvation in the country conjured premonitions of a political catastrophe.⁵⁵

Putting the Famine in the International Arena

The government sought means for publicizing state relief efforts in the international media in order to improve the image of the state abroad and to stimulate international charity.⁵⁶ Towards those ends, it permitted the RRC to discuss the growing starvation conditions with foreign journalists and relief agencies, but limited their exposure in the national press. In 1978, the Government permitted the International Committee of the Red Cross to film starvation conditions in western Wollo and the efforts which the RRC had made to alleviate them. From 1 to 4 May 1980, the RRC took

⁵⁴ The "delivery order" is a document prepared by the ship's agent after presentation of the original bill of lading. The document lists the particulars of the consignment along with the port handling and wharfage charges that the port authorities will exact before discharge. Until these fees are paid a forwarder cannot take custody of the consignment.

⁵⁵ Yusuf Ahmed, Minister of Transport and Communications, to Comrade Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Commissioner of the RRC, 25 September 1984, CRDA Archives Department, Addis Ababa, RRC Files: June-December 1984.

⁵⁶ CRDA, "Minutes of the 138th General Meeting," 6 November 1978, "Minutes of the 139th General Meeting," 4 December 1978, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, File: 1978.

representatives of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), WFP, EEC and Catholic Relief Services, among others, on a tour of Bale, Hararghe and Gamu-Goffa administrative regions to observe the consequences of famine induced or exacerbated by the influx of refugees into Ethiopia from neighbouring countries.⁵⁷

Large numbers of refugees from Somalia, Sudan, Kenya and Djibouti entered Ethiopia in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the hope of obtaining relief food or work from domestic and international relief organizations. The refusal of the UNHCR office in Addis Ababa to recognize and assist them as bonafide refugees put a considerable strain on the Ethiopian government as well as the food supply situation. The RRC put the number of people in Ethiopia who required immediate relief assistance or risked death from starvation in 1979 at 3.7 million.⁵⁸

The presence of many refugees in Ethiopia aggravated famine, but provided an opportunity for the RRC to present starvation in the country as the consequence of the refugee problem. At the U.N. Conference on Less Developed Countries held in Addis Ababa in May 1981, RRC Commissioner Shimelis

⁵⁷ CRDA, "Minutes of the 156th General Meeting," 5 May 1980, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, File: 1980.

⁵⁸ By 1984 about 380,000 Somali refugees and 25,000 refugees from Djibouti lived in Ethiopia. Mr. Raymond Fell, Deputy Liaison Representative of the UNHCR in Addis Ababa put the number of Sudanese refugees living in Gambella by June 1987 at 121,000. See CRDA, "Minutes of the 239th General Meeting," 7 September 1987, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, File: 1987.

Adugna raised that factor, but was diplomatic in his approach. He cited the underdevelopment of Ethiopia's economy as the "the underlying cause of. . . starvation and death" in Ethiopia and made a plea for development assistance in the form of money, equipment for the construction of warehouses, agricultural machines, and water pumps from the international community.⁵⁹

Mass Death from Starvation, 1983-1984

By 1983, all the fourteen regions of Ethiopia had been severely affected by starvation caused by the interaction of natural disasters, political instability in neighbouring Sudan and Somalia, drought in Kenya and Djibouti as well as war between the Revolutionary Government and ethnic-based insurgent groups. The minor rainy season-- Belg-- which extends from February to May and accounts for almost 20 percent of national annual food production, failed in 1983.⁶⁰ Had the major rainy season--Meher--which occurs from June to September and accounts, in normal years, for about 80 percent of national food production been evenly distributed in 1983,

⁵⁹ Shimelis Adugna, ex-Commissioner of the RRC, "The Role of Donors and NGOS in Relief and Development," 27 February 1995, p.2.

⁶⁰ The Belg rain is responsible for half of the food output in the highlands of Bale, Wollo and Northern Shoa and about half of the livestock production in Tigray, Gamu-Goffa, Sidamo and Arsi. Maize and Sorghum are planted during the Belg months. About 60 percent of the barley crop in Ethiopia depend on the season for maturity.

many people could have grown enough to feed themselves and recover from cyclical crop failures. The failure of the Meher rain in the north and in some areas of the south and the east worsened the drought situation that had existed in those areas since 1980.

Drought problems were especially acute in the Ogaden and Gambella. They got worse in eastern Wollo where the Afar Liberation Front intensified its war against the government. The RRC forecast a serious food shortage in Raya, Kobo, Yejjju, Ambassel, Wag and Lasta awrajas in Wollo in January 1983 and asked international relief agencies in Addis Ababa for immediate food assistance.⁶¹ The reported death of about 177,500 heads of cattle in Libo, Gayint, Simien and Wagara awrajas in Gondar administrative region as a result of drought in 1982 and 1983, severely affected crop production in a region that depended on ox-drawn plough agriculture. War discouraged migration, which provided an important means of surviving lethal famine. The RRC put the number of people who were at risk of dying from starvation, in December 1983, at about 10.7 million and asked foreign relief agencies in Addis Ababa to help obtain 1,504,775 MT of food for them.⁶²

By March 1984, the famine had degenerated into mass death

⁶¹ CRDA, "Minutes of the 188th General Meeting," 3 January 1983, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, File: 1983.

⁶² CRDA, "Minutes of the 189th General Meeting," 7 February 1983; "Minutes of the 192nd General Meeting," 2 May 1983, CRDA Archives Department, Addis Ababa, File: 1983.

on a national scale. The RRC convened meetings of representatives of foreign governments, U.N. agencies and NGOs, in Addis Ababa, on 30 March 1984, and 5 August 1984 and made an emotional appeal for food and vehicles. These appeals demonstrated that by 1984 the relief mechanisms of the RRC could no longer work or had been stretched to the point of inability to cope with a widening crises. As it did in 1978, the Government permitted the RRC, in May of 1984, to invite a crew of British television journalists to film the "drought" in Ethiopia to raise funds in Britain for the Ethiopian Government's relief efforts. While the RRC sought international help, it insisted that the relief of famine in Ethiopia was a domestic affair which "no foreign government or outside agency could do... better" than the RRC.⁶³

Underlying the Government's recourse to international help and its affirmation of sovereignty was a crucial anxiety. It hesitated to welcome assistance at its time of greatest need if it eroded its ability to control famine assistance or if such assistance signified "yielding its sovereignty and [therefore] admitting that it was incapable of governing."⁶⁴ The same anxiety compounded the frustrations that RRC officials experienced as they tried to balance the requirements of sovereignty, state security and

⁶³ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.315.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

humanitarianism in a looming human catastrophe.⁶⁵

The failure of the *Meher* rains in northeastern and southeastern Ethiopia for the third consecutive season in September 1984 precipitated the biggest distress migrations to government relief centres ever seen in Ethiopia. Over seven million persons were estimated to be in grave danger.⁶⁶ The Government could neither object to the establishment of relief shelters nor place sovereignty before humanity. It was in the relief shelters of Makelle, in Tigray and Korem, Alamata, and Bati, in Wollo administrative region that the enormous extent of famine in Ethiopia in the 1980s became evident. At these relief shelters, foreign television journalists documented scenes of starvation and death which convulsed the Ethiopian government and the international community into acting to save lives.

Famine and Relief As Instruments of Warfare, 1984-90

Mass death from starvation in 1984 was partly the result of the use of famine and starvation by all sides in the civil war as instruments of warfare. The response of the Revolutionary Government to death from starvation was slow and inadequate. Neither the 5 million *Birr* which it allocated to the RRC to buy grain from surplus areas to relieve famine in

⁶⁵ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, RRC Commissioner, to Brother Augustine O'Keefe, 21 September 1984, CRDA Archives Department, Addis Ababa, RRC Files: June-December 1984.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

deficit regions nor the distribution of 5,000 metric tons of grain by the AMC in March 1984 ameliorated the full-blown disaster. Furthermore, the Government's grant of 1.7 million Birr to cover the costs of discharging food at the ports and transporting them to needy areas, and the high-profile appointment of ministerial committees to oversee the relief effort, were inadequate to meet the magnitude of mass death from starvation in 1984.⁶⁷ These gestures obscured the time and money the Government spent to ensure a colourful celebration of the tenth anniversary of military rule which fell on 12 September 1984.⁶⁸

Not long before 12 September 1984 when the PMGSE converted itself into the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE), it revealed its top priority by ordering many members of the staff of the RRC to participate in parades and banner-waving exercises in Addis Ababa. Some senior officials of the RRC viewed these actions of the government with disquiet. But in the atmosphere of state terror, open challenge to the government could have dire consequences for the daring.⁶⁹ To prevent external relief operations from eroding its power, the

⁶⁷ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, RRC Commissioner, to Joseph P. O'Neil, Counsellor, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, 24 September 1984. RRC Archives Department, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 2.

⁶⁸ See Peter McPherson, "The Ethiopian famine in the Mid-1980s," p.9.

⁶⁹ Author's tape interview with Taye Gurmu, ex-Deputy Commissioner of the RRC, Addis Ababa, 12 October 1995.

Government regulated the operations of foreign relief workers, tightened visa regulations and centralized permission to travel outside Addis Ababa in the Ministry of Public Security.

Anti-government movements in Ethiopia were actually more successful than the Government in integrating famine and relief aid into their political and military agenda.⁷⁰ By publicizing the famine which the Government censored and by exaggerating state culpability in its occurrence, the TPLF and EPLF were able to obscure the negative effects on food production of their equally socialist agricultural policies in the areas under their control.⁷¹ The EPLF enforced collective food production, organized peasant associations and armed peasants. It expected peasants in its domain to have "a revolutionary outlook [and to] fully participate" in the armed struggle against "Ethiopian colonialism."⁷²

All warring parties pursued military policies which accentuated starvation and violated the Geneva Conventions

⁷⁰ John Prendergast and Mark Duffield, "Liberation Politics and External Engagement in Ethiopia and Eritrea," Discussion Paper No. 8, Horn of Africa Discussion Paper Series, April 1995, p.3.

⁷¹ For details of the EPLF's agricultural policies see its "The National Democratic Programme of the EPLF," adopted by the First Congress of the EPLF on 31 January 1977, in Basil Davidson, Lionel Cliffe and Bereket Habte Selassie, Behind the War in Eritrea (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1980), pp. 143, 144, 149 and author's interview with Tekliwoini Assefa, Head of the Relief Society of Tigray, 30 January 1995.

⁷² Basil Davidson, Lionel Cliffe and Bereket Habte Selassie, Behind the War in Eritrea (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1980), pp.144, 149.

prohibiting the starvation of civilians as a weapon of war.⁷³ Where neither the Government nor the insurgent groups could ensure the neutrality of external actors in the relief effort or control the direction of food relief convoys, attacks on food convoys became a means of weakening opponents rather than using that strategy to exterminate them. The TPLF and EPLF operated on the axiom that international food relief provided the state with a source of strength that prolonged its existence and enabled it to wreak "mayhem."⁷⁴ By attacking relief convoys heading for zones under government control, the EPLF and TPLF succeeded in heightening starvation conditions in areas outside their control. The object was not to deliberately starve people to death, but to create the condition which would force the starving to depend on their relief organs.⁷⁵

By providing food, shelter and medicine, and by encouraging and helping those who could not get relief from the government to cross the border to Sudan, where they could

⁷³ For a detailed discussion of the aspects of the Geneva Conventions dealing with starvation and the right of civilians to humanitarian assistance in a time of war, see Larry Minear, Thomas G. Weiss, and Kurt M. Campbell, "Humanitarianism and War: Learning the Lessons from Recent Armed Conflicts," Occasional Paper No. 8, The Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, 1991, pp.7-13.

⁷⁴ Solomon Inquai, "Reflections on the 1984-85 Famine," p.7. Dr. Inquai was a senior official of the TPLF.

⁷⁵ Author's interview with Tekliwoini Assefa, Head of the Relief Society of Tigray, 30 January 1995.

receive aid from REST and ERA, the TPLF and EPLF successfully integrated public welfare into their military strategies and broadened their political support in the domestic struggle for power.⁷⁶ The TPLF and EPLF cleverly garnered international sympathy for their causes and succeeded in effectively concealing their attacks on relief convoys and the impact that had on access to food in areas outside their control. Their successful propaganda generated international sympathy and increased the flows of foreign relief resources to their own relief organs through the Cross Border Operation, making them more independent of state supplied resources.

As we have observed in chapter five, the Government also accelerated, in 1984, its resettlement of people from one part of the country to another.⁷⁷ The pace, scale, timing and the poor organization of resettlement exposed the strategic uses to which the government put the programme after 1984. Between October 1984 and February 1986, resettlement became an extension of the government's counter-insurgency strategies and also its policy of checking the spread of relief shelters. As starvation intensified against the backdrop of war and the

⁷⁶ See Relief Society of Tigray Information Unit, "1991/92 Report," p.6; Solomon Inquai, "Reflections on the 1984-85 Famine," pp.2-3; John Prendergast and Mark Duffield, "Liberation Politics and External Engagement in Ethiopia and Eritrea," Discussion Paper No. 8, Horn of Africa Discussion Paper Series, April 1995, pp.8-9.

⁷⁷ Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, RRC Commissioner, to Mr. Marvin Williams, Africana Studies and Research Center, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, USA, 14 May 1985. RRC Archives Division FGU 3/26 "USA AID vol. 2.

influx of foreign relief agencies, food shelters became the visible expression of state failure to deal with famine. Some of the relief shelters became havens for anti-government propaganda.⁷⁸ To neutralize anti-government propaganda and also to deprive the rebel groups of potential recruits, the government used promises of providing food and vaccinating infected cattle to lure people to areas where they were rounded-up by government soldiers and transported, against their will, to transit camps for resettlement in distant districts.

Some of those who voluntarily registered to be resettled claim that they found government promises of land, oxen, fertilizer, tractors, houses, and medical care in the new settlements irresistible in the midst of starvation. The post-1984 resettlement campaign was not a complete failure. Poor planning and attacks on resettlement villages by anti-government groups ruined the programme in Asosa and Illubabor. In Gambella administrative region and Pawe, in Gojjam, resettlement was successful.⁷⁹

So bent was the Government on implementing resettlement, for the political advantages it held, that it overlooked the human rights abuses perpetrated by recruiters and the

⁷⁸ See Berhane Deressa, RRC Commissioner, to the Editor, Wall Street Journal, January 31, 1986. CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, RRC Reports and Minutes: January-December 1986 and also Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.317.

⁷⁹ Author's tape interview with resettles in resettlement villages 14 and 23, Pawe, Est Gojjam, 1 October 1995.

contradictions that resettlement generated. Some peasants who had lost crops and livestock, and sold all their property, but did not want to move to inhospitable regions, feigned prosperity in order to avoid resettlement thereby accentuating their conditions.⁸⁰ The rapid pace at which the government wanted resettlement to go led to the accidental or deliberate transportation of people who had adequate land, livestock and food crops that should not have made them candidates for resettlement. The resettlement programme also provided opportunities for local officials to advance their political careers and settle old scores. Officials of peasant associations thought they demonstrated their loyalty to the government by showing to higher officials the large numbers of peasants they had recruited for resettlement. Other local party officials found resettlement a good opportunity to seize the land and cattle of peasants that they resettled.⁸¹

The pattern of variations in the number of people resettled from the various regions in the early 1980s has been adduced by Kurt Jansson, who ran the U.N. relief operation in Ethiopia, and Peter Gill, a correspondent of the Daily Telegraph of London, as evidence that resettlement was a sincere response to famine devoid of any intent to eliminate in whole or in part distinct ethnic groups as Robert Kaplan

⁸⁰ Author's tape interview with Desta Girmay [42 years], Atsibi woreda, Tigray, Ethiopia, 22 September 1995.

⁸¹ Author's tape interview with peasants at Wegel Tena, North Wollo Administrative Region, Ethiopia, 12 October 1995.

and Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb have suggested.⁸² References made by the government, and its sympathetic international observers to the large numbers of Oromo, Amhara, and Kembatta ethnic groups taken from Wollo, Shoa, Gondar and Gojjam regions, where opposition to the Government was negligible, as evidence of the sincere pursuit of resettlement as a development policy, reveal as much as they disguise.⁸³ The de-facto military situation which the EPLF and TPLF established in Tigray and Eritrea made it difficult for Government agents to resettle large numbers of people from those regions.

Obviously, relocating even a small number of potential farmers and potential recruits who were accessible to the EPLF and TPLF in northern Ethiopia to areas controlled by the Government in the south and south-west, had strategic advantages which far outweighed any economic benefits that an embattled government hoped to reap from resettlement in a civil war situation. Certainly, sending weak and emaciated peasants to inclement conditions and settlement camps in the south and southwest, without providing the settlers with adequate medical help to overcome malaria and other diseases, was a criminal act tantamount to manslaughter. However, there

⁸² See Kurt Jansson, Michael Harris and Angela Penrose, The Ethiopian Famine, Revised and Updated Edition, pp. 64, 66; Peter Gill, A Year in the Death of Africa, p.143; Robert Kaplan, Surrender or Starve, p.101; Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb, Politics and the Ethiopian Famine, pp. 21, 193.

⁸³ See Kurt Jansson, Michael Harris and Angela Penrose, The Ethiopian Famine, Revised and Updated Edition, pp.25-26.

is little evidence to sustain a motive behind the resettlement programme to "uproot...distinct peoples in one region of the country" as Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb have claimed or "to exterminate the TPLF's rural base" as Robert Kaplan has emphasized."⁸⁴

Clay and Holcomb's point is made more explicit by the Wall Street Journal. It described the resettlement campaign between 1984 and 1986 as "organized group murder...on the order of the Khmer Rouge killing fields and the deportation of Armenians in 1915."⁸⁵ The comparison of the resettlement campaign in Ethiopia to the relocation of people from urban centres to villages by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and the genocide against Armenians by the Turkish government raises questions about the relationship between the U.N. definition of genocide and what occurred in Revolutionary Ethiopia. It also raises questions about the crimes which the Ethiopian government committed and whether its patterns of abuse constitute crimes against humanity or genocide.

Genocide or Crimes Against Humanity?

A detailed analysis of international humanitarian law or the legal concepts of genocide and crimes against humanity is

⁸⁴ Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb, Politics and the Ethiopian Famine, p.193; Robert Kaplan, Surrender or Starve, p.101.

⁸⁵ The Wall Street Journal, "Today's Holocaust," 27 January 1986, p.24.

beyond the scope of this study. However, it is appropriate to state that legal specialists distinguish between genocide and crimes against humanity. The United Nations Genocide Convention specifies that genocide is:

any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group...(a) by killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [and] (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.⁸⁶

The U.N. War Crimes Commission recognized in its 1949 Law Reports that "the crime of genocide. . . bears similarity to certain types of crimes against humanity but also certain dissimilarities." While the Commission acknowledged that genocide and crimes against humanity may overlap, it considered genocide as "aimed against groups" whereas "crimes against humanity do not necessarily involve offenses against or persecution of groups."⁸⁷ The Commission went on to observe that:

deeds are crimes against humanity within the meaning of [Control Council] Law No. 10 if the political, racial or religious background of the wronged person is the main reason for the wrong

⁸⁶ See "UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide," in Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 44-47.

⁸⁷ United Nations War Crimes Commission, Law Reports of Trials of War Criminals, Vol. 15 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1949), p.138.

done to him, and if the wrong done to him as an individual is done as part of a policy or trend directed against persons of his political, racial or religious background; but that it is not necessary that the wronged person belong to an organized or well-defined group.⁸⁸

While genocide is a crime against humanity, in international law, crimes against humanity include:

atrocities and offenses, including but not limited to murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, imprisonment, torture, rape or other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population, or persecutions on political, racial or religious grounds, whether or not in violation of the domestic laws of the country where perpetrated."⁸⁹

In August 1976, the U.S. Congress criticized the Ethiopian Government for burning villages suspected of having assisted insurgents. Congress cited Government interference with "food and medical relief" for about 400,000 Eritrean civilians in Sudan in 1975 and characterized these actions as "verging on genocide."⁹⁰ Congress viewed the torture, "summary executions," "mass arrests without cause," and the "bombing of civilian marketplaces," as manifestations of state-organized genocide.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ United Nations War Crimes Commission, Law reports of Trials of war Criminals, Vol. 15 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1949), p.138.

⁹⁰ Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, 4-6 August 1976, 66.

⁹¹ Ibid.

At the centre of the Congressional criticism lies the unresolved question of whether or not the Ethiopian government possessed or demonstrated the criminal intent to destroy particular ethnic or religious groups in Ethiopia by killing members of the group, causing bodily or mental harm to them, deliberately inflicting conditions aimed at exterminating them or forcibly transferring children of the victim group to another group with intent to stifle the reproduction of that group as genocide has been defined under the U.N Genocide Convention. As we have seen throughout this discussion, it is difficult to argue that the Revolutionary Government intended "to destroy, in whole or in part" particular ethnic or religious groups.

According to Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb, the Oromo, the largest group in Ethiopia, posed "the most serious threat" to governments in Ethiopia since the time of Menelik in the nineteenth century.⁹² As Clay and Holcomb put it, resettlement had, since the time of Menelik, become a strategy by which "people who have been problematic to the ruling regime. . . are made dependent on the central state by being placed into regions where residents are predictably hostile to newcomers." Clay and Holcomb argue that resettlement "became a major part of a formula for dividing and conquering distinct peoples in

⁹² Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb, Politics and the Ethiopian Famine, p.25

[Ethiopia].⁹³

Clay and Holcomb are right in situating the Mengistu Government's resettlement programme within a long-standing state strategy of relocating people for security reasons. However, people who were forcibly resettled in 1984 were not relocated on the basis of their ethnicity but by their material condition and the political circumstances which existed in places where they lived.⁹⁴ The resettlement of Oromos and Amharas from Wollo, Tigrayans and other ethnic groups from Tigray, in the north, Amharas and Oromos from Shoa, in central Ethiopia, Beta Israel (Felashas) from Gondar, in the northeast, Kembatas and Hadiyas from Keffa province in the southeast and vagrants in Addis Ababa and other urban areas undermines the argument that resettlement was aimed at destroying a particular ethnic group.

Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn have broadened the U.N. definition of genocide to illuminate the subtleties of contemporary genocides.⁹⁵ Chalk and Jonassohn argue that the United Nations erred by excluding the protection of political

⁹³ Ibid., p.26.

⁹⁴ Author's tape interviews with Amhara and Oromo resettles at Pawe resettlement villages 14 and 23, Pawe, East Gojjam Administrative Region, 1 October 1995 and with Tesfaye Mekasha Amare, ex-vice minister of Foreign Affairs in the Imperial Government, Addis Ababa, 16 November 1995.

⁹⁵ See Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 27-32.

groups from the Genocide Convention. But they agree with the stipulation in the U.N. definition of genocide that the killings must be part of a deliberate attempt to destroy the group, an action which the U.N. labelled as "acts committed with intent." The Chalk-Jonassohn definition recognizes that it is the perpetrator who defines the boundaries of the group to be destroyed and that quite often the perpetrator's ideology converts real ethnic, national, racial and religious groups into political groups, which the perpetrator then targets for destruction.⁹⁶

Their recognition of the inadequacy of the U.N. Genocide Convention to accommodate late 20th Century genocides, which are often induced by the state and directed predominantly against political groups, is significant for understanding some of the events in Ethiopia of the revolutionary period. Under the Chalk-Jonassohn definition, if there was an intent to kill all or many of the civilian members of a political group, as part of the Ethiopian state's deliberate attempt to destroy that political group, their killing would constitute an act of genocide. However, in the case of Ethiopia, the perpetrators (i.e. the leaders of the Revolutionary state) demonstrated no intent to destroy an ethnic, national, racial, or religious group, as such, a consideration which would exclude them from punishment under the U.N. Genocide

⁹⁶ Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, The History and Sociology of Genocide, p.23-26.

Convention. Nor did the perpetrators demonstrate an intent to kill all or many of the civilians living in territory under the control of groups opposed to the Revolutionary Government, in order to destroy those groups, as such, which would exclude the Government's leaders from prosecution for genocide if the Chalk-Jonassohn definition of genocide were ever adopted by international authorities.

Suspicion that unpublicized relief assistance from non-governmental organizations helped the TPLF and EPLF to recruit peasants as soldiers was a strong motive behind the post-1984 resettlement campaign.⁹⁷ This motive was reinforced when the Government impounded an Australian ship, the *Golden Venture*, at Assab port in January 1985. The vessel, which was bound for the Red Sea port of Port Sudan, in the Republic of Sudan, contained relief cargo clearly marked for delivery to the EPLF and TPLF, and had mistakenly berthed at Assab. The incident confirmed long-held Government views that international sympathy for anti-government groups increased the flow of resources to their relief organs, which strengthened the TPLF and EPLF. The poorly-planned and hastily organized resettlement campaign from October 1984 to February 1986 was mainly a measure undertaken to intimidate and isolate

⁹⁷ RRC, Addis Ababa, *Official Statement*, "A Frustrated Outcry," 3 October 1986, FAO Archives, Addis Ababa, IL 2/2 RRC Files Feb. 1986-August 1987, January-December 1988.

potential soldiers of the TPLF and EPLF.⁹⁸

The atrocities of the Revolutionary Government and its armed insurgent opponents lacked the requisite intent or *mens rea* to constitute genocide. They amount rather to crimes against humanity. Acts such as murder, inhumane reprisals against civilian populations, before or during war, mass persecution of individuals on the basis of their political, racial and religious affiliations are "crimes against humanity" under the Charter of the International Military Tribunal (the Nuremberg Tribunal).⁹⁹ The indiscriminate destruction of Eritrean and Tigrayan villages by the Government exhibited an intent to create terror in order to discourage support for the TPLF and EPLF, in a civil war situation, rather than to liquidate the ethnic groups of the villagers. This strategy and the responses of the armed opposition groups in defence of secession and ethnic-self-determination led to the mass killings of civilians during the Mengistu period.

⁹⁸ Author's tape interview with Tesfaye Mekasha Amare, ex-Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Imperial Government, Addis Ababa, 16 November 1995. See also Taye Gurmu, Deputy Commissioner of the RRC, to Brother Augustine O'Keefe, CRDA, 29 May 1986, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, RRC Files: Reports and Minutes, Jan. 1985-Dec.1985.

⁹⁹ See Helsinki Watch, War Crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina, (Finland: Helsinki-Watch, 1993), p. 394.

Collapse of the Revolutionary Government, 1987-1991

The manner in which government and anti-government groups waged war put roads, relief vehicles and drivers in serious jeopardy. All parties to the civil war put victory above the relief of starvation. By late 1987, the slow pace at which food moved from one point to another became a function of the war.¹⁰⁰ On 23 October 1987, an unescorted convoy of sixteen trucks, belonging to the World Food Program Transport Operation (WTOE), and seven trucks belonging to the U.S. Catholic Relief Services and the Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat, were attacked and burned by EPLF soldiers at Dekamhare, 40 kilometres from Asmara in Eritrea.¹⁰¹ The convoy carried a total of 580 metric tonnes of WFP relief food for government distribution centres in Adigrat in Tigray. The attack occurred at 10:30 a.m. and the perpetrators could not have failed to recognize the United Nations and Catholic Relief Services logos on the trucks. They did not instruct the convoy to stop for identification, but forced it to a halt by firing at the truck tires, killing the driver of the ninth truck, Ato Berhe Gilay, and wounding three CRS drivers.

When the attackers, who identified themselves as EPLF soldiers, approached the trucks to burn them, they "did not

¹⁰⁰ Mike D'Adamo, Catholic Relief Services, New York, to Pat Johns, Catholic Relief Services, Addis Ababa, June 17, 1989, "Status of Food Distributions in Eritrea," CRS Archives, Addis Ababa, File No.17 Program/Grant.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

make any attempt" to identify the cargo or salvage it. The cargo consisted of UN relief food intended for distribution in an area controlled by the TPLF. The EPLF justified that action by arguing that in its war against "the enemy...[it] had no time to identify which trucks were enemy and which ones were not."¹⁰² Such attacks on relief convoys hampered the domestic and the international relief efforts. They also led many foreign relief agencies to suspend their operations in the war zones in Tigray, Wollo, Gondar and Eritrea.

Exposure of relief vehicles and their drivers to the danger of attacks triggered Ethiopian government insistence on military escort of all relief convoys. However, protection did not always guarantee safe passage. Rather it provided a pretext for the Government to delay the transport of relief food to areas outside its control. The presence of armed escorts provoked more attacks on food convoys by anti-government groups. Escorted convoys encountered landmines planted by government and anti-government groups. Between August and October 1987, the Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat and the American Catholic Relief Services lost nine heavy duty trucks, and by 1990, about 90 trucks had been lost in northern

¹⁰² John Waiter, Catholic Relief Services, Addis Ababa, to Executive Director, World Food Programme, Rome, Commissioner Berhanu Jembere, RRC Commissioner, Addis Ababa, Rich Machmer, USAID Mission to Ethiopia, 23 October 1987, "RE: Report of Incident at 51 kms on Asmara-Adigrat Road on 23/10/87," CRS Archives, Addis Ababa, Program/Grant No.19. See also Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat, Asmara, to Catholic Relief Services, Addis Ababa, "Addition to Telex MSG. No. 558/87, 26 October 1987," CRS Archives, Addis Ababa, Program/Grant No.19.

Ethiopia through these strategies of war.¹⁰³

In the last week of December 1987, the EPLF attacked and destroyed trucks carrying food donated by the Italian government on the road from Massawa to Asmara. The food was being transported from the port of Massawa to the city of Asmara, in Eritrea, and to Tigray administrative region for distribution in government-relief centres. In the same month, unidentified armed men forced trucks carrying relief grain dispatched from Addis Ababa to Adigrat, in Tigray, by the Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat to return to Addis Ababa.¹⁰⁴

The road between Massawa and Asmara remained closed to all traffic during a clash between government soldiers and EPLF forces at Massawa, on 8 February 1988.¹⁰⁵ The military struggle over Massawa severely damaged the port. War and the closure of roads by the Government and the TPLF, EPLF and WSLF in 1988 occurred against the backdrop of starvation in Tigray, Eritrea and the Ogaden. In September 1988, 60,000 MT of food

¹⁰³ Catholic Relief Services, Addis Ababa, to Pezzullo/Holdridge/Johns, Catholic Relief Services, New York, October 29, 1987, "Imminent Northern Crisis," CRS Archives, Addis Ababa, Program/Grant No. 19

¹⁰⁴ Catholic Relief Services, "Press Release: Transport-Update-22 December 1987," CRS Archives, Nazareth, Ethiopia, Program/Grant No.19.

¹⁰⁵ See Catholic Relief Services, "Situation Report No.6," 9-15 1989," CRS Archives, Nazareth, Ethiopia, Program/Grant No.15: ECS/Asmara; Catholic Relief Services, "Proposal For Program Support for JRP [Joint Relief Partnership] 1990 Emergency Relief Program in Tigray," 7 March 1990, CRS Archives, Addis Ababa, File No.13 Program/Grant: Southern Line-1990.

decomposed at Assab port while other relief food awaited transportation. Besides the problem at Assab, 53,000 MT of food lay exposed to spoilage at Massawa while 8,000 MT of American food for Catholic Relief Services in Addis Ababa decayed at Djibouti.¹⁰⁶

From January 1989 to May 1991, the major threat to Ethiopia was not drought or the shortage of food, but the difficulty of transporting large quantities of relief food from ports and warehouses to the areas where they were needed.¹⁰⁷ When international relief agencies could not immediately replace long-haul vehicles which both government and anti-government soldiers destroyed through landmines or deliberately shot at and burnt, starving civilians became the victims. When relief agencies could not easily and safely deliver food to them, the starving succumbed to needless death.

The growing domestic disaffection with the Revolutionary Government enabled the TPLF to form and lead a coalition of anti-government groups, the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), in January 1989, to strengthen the

¹⁰⁶ See Catholic Relief Services, "Situation Report No.6," 15 September 1989," CRS Archives, Nazareth, Ethiopia, Program/Grant No.15: ECS/Asmara; Catholic Relief Services, "Proposal For Program Support for JRP [Joint Relief Partnership] 1990 Emergency Relief Program in Tigray," 7 March 1990, CRS Archives, Addis Ababa, File No.13 Program/Grant: Southern Line-1990.

¹⁰⁷ CRDA, "Minutes of the 254th General Meeting," 5 December 1989, CRDA Archives Department, Addis Ababa, File: 1989.

armed opposition to the Government. The Revolutionary Government realized by March 1990 that its failure to prevent famine had undermined political support for it at home to the benefit of its political opponents. That realization came too late to repair its militant approach to national unity which accentuated famine, led to mass death from starvation and generated discontent among the people in whose name it justified its dictatorship.

The Revolutionary Government had degenerated in its brutality and unpopularity to the point that even its most ardent admirers hailed the entry of the EPRDF into Addis Ababa in May 1991.¹⁰⁸ Mengistu fled the country when he could no longer keep his government and soldiers united through either persuasion or coercion. The victory of anti-government forces made the secession of Eritrea, which the Revolutionary Government had sought to prevent since 1975, easier to accomplish.

¹⁰⁸ Author's tape interview with Tesfaye Mekasha Amare, ex-Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Imperial Government, Addis Ababa, 16 November 1995.

Conclusion

The Revolutionary Government succeeded in altering the view that famine in Ethiopia was primarily an act of God. Its new perspective on famine as a political crime affirmed the obligation of the state to provide food to relieve famine. As in the Imperial Period, famine did not occur suddenly in the Revolutionary Period. It manifested itself gradually in stages marked by drought, crop failure, livestock epidemics, distress migrations, malnutrition, disease and death. Having failed through its reactive and populist agricultural policies to prevent the process of famine, the Government failed to prevent it from degenerating into mass death from starvation.

Mass death from starvation in Ethiopia was largely the result of political crises which triggered war and politically-motivated relief decisions by government leaders and their opponents, rather than of drought and other natural causes. The political origins of famine and starvation in Ethiopia became more and more evident as all sides in the domestic struggle for power fought to enforce their respective visions of post-Imperial Ethiopia and used famine and starvation as weapons against their political opponents. The actions of the state and its opponents undermined the efforts of the RRC and complementary organizations to transport and distribute available local food and international relief donations to those who needed them to survive. Massive domestic and international relief efforts from 1984 to 1990

reduced the number of deaths from starvation, but the disaster of famine was not contained until the decisive victory of anti-Government forces over the Government in May 1991.

The final triumph of the EPLF-backed EPRDF on 28 May 1991 paved the way for the secession of Eritrea from Ethiopia in April 1993, and the establishment of a high court to try members of the deposed Mengistu government for genocide and crimes against humanity.¹⁰⁹ The author has argued that the available evidence supports the charges against the defendants of committing crimes against humanity but not of genocide. If he is correct, this raises an important question: Why did the EPRDF's Transitional Government of Ethiopia charge the defendants with genocide. As of December 1997, the Special Prosecutor's Office has as yet to present its evidence of genocide. One delay has followed another at the Central High Court. In the meantime, the charges of genocide have the effect of demonizing the Mengistu regime, legitimizing the rule of the EPRDF and demonstrating its concern for human rights before the international community.

¹⁰⁹ The author attended the initial sessions of the trial in March 1995 with the permission of the Central High Court.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ETHIOPIAN SOCIALISM AND AMERICAN FAMINE RELIEF POLITICS, 1975-1991

Between the decline of famine in 1975 and its resurgence in 1984, the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) combatted pockets of food shortages in northern and south-eastern Ethiopia. Certainly, the RRC could not relieve famine in the period after Haile Sellassie without American food assistance. On the other hand, the United States could not offer its humanitarian aid to the people of Ethiopia without the help of the Ethiopian government. Various considerations went into shaping the U.S.-Ethiopian partnership to save lives threatened by famine. This chapter examines American perceptions of the famines of that period, the factors which influenced the U.S-Ethiopian famine-relief relationship and the impact of American human rights foreign policy in Revolutionary Ethiopia.

Demarcating Relief and Rehabilitation, 1975-1978

American officials in Addis Ababa continued to question the bases of the RRC's relief needs in the early revolutionary period. Like American officials, UNDP officials in Addis Ababa bewailed "the absence of reliable statistics" to verify the RRC's estimation of food needs. This concern led the UNDP, whose views the American Embassy and USAID-E partly shared, to conclude that the RRC and the Ethiopian government

deliberately exploited international charity to prevent famine to avoid another political crisis in Ethiopia.¹

American opposition to the RRC's food estimates was partly political. It arose from the determination of American policy-makers to separate legitimate emergency relief assistance to alleviate a compelling human need from the provision of illegitimate economic development assistance to the anti-American government in Addis Ababa. Congress and the State Department tied American famine-relief aid to the receipt of clear and detailed information about food supplies and foreign exchange reserves from the Ethiopian government in January 1976.²

The RRC and the Revolutionary Government had distinct, but sometimes converging objectives which made the provision of that clear and detailed information impossible. After the Revolutionary Government passed the Penal Code making famine a political crime in Ethiopia, the leaders of the Government and the RRC lived in terror that they would be liquidated if there was the slightest sign of famine in post-Imperial

¹ See John M. Saunders, Assistant Administrator and Regional Representative of the UNDP office in Addis Ababa, to Mr. Michel Doo Kingue, Assistant Administrator and Regional Director, Regional Bureau for Africa, UNDP, New York, 31 March 1976, WFP Archives, Addis Ababa, UNDP File. Also see "Notes On A Meeting of Representatives of U.N. Agencies, Major Bilateral Donors and Voluntary Agencies in the UNDP Conference Room," Addis Ababa, 26 March 1976, WFP Archives, Addis Ababa, UNDP File. Mr J. Shepard of the USAID-E attended the meeting.

² Press Release from Congressman Les Aspin, "Ethiopian Famine Could Have Been Avoided," 14 January 1976, Washington, D.C., RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU/311.

Ethiopia. The Government and the RRC concealed information about famine and only provided it when it served particular purposes.

The RRC wanted to use foreign food aid to pay for development work on road, dam and irrigation projects aimed at preventing famine or minimizing its lethal consequences.³ But it is probable that the RRC requests for aid, especially from the United States, were made in the face of opposition from the Revolutionary Government. Repeated RRC requests for American food for development work made the Government's claim of solving the problem of famine through its socialist agricultural policies look hollow. Furthermore, they undermined the anti-American rhetoric of some members of the Government. The position of the Revolutionary Government on foreign food aid was quite inconsistent. While it saw food aid as an avenue for accumulating resources for development and rehabilitation work, continuous RRC dependence on American food clashed with the efforts of the government, at certain times, to conceal the fact that famine was still a problem in Ethiopia despite the overthrow of the Emperor.

³ See Shimelis Adugna, RRC Commissioner to Frederick L. Chapin, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, 31 May 1980, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 1 and also Shimelis Adugna, ex-Commissioner of the RRC, "The Role of Donors and NGOS in Relief and Development," Paper Presented at the Regional Workshop on Lessons Learnt and Future Development Priorities and Strategies: Ten Years after the 1984-85 Famine," Awassa, Ethiopia, 27 February 1995, p.13.

It is probable that pressure from the Revolutionary Government caused the RRC to announce in March 1976 that the Revolutionary Government had almost eliminated famine in Ethiopia.⁴ That bold declaration concealed the precarious food situation in Dire-Dawa and the desperate condition of some peasants in the semi-arid areas of the country. Nevertheless, it provided ideological ammunition for the Government's struggle to project itself as the liberator of Ethiopian peasants. For its part, the RRC needed such a declaration to shift the focus of international famine-aid to Ethiopia from the fulfilment of emergency needs to assistance for the development of the economy of famine-prone regions.

The U.S. Congress favoured assistance for emergency purposes rather than giving aid to a regime with a questionable human rights record in Addis Ababa. Despite its plan to use famine-aid for economic development purposes, the RRC often disguised its food requests to the United States as intended to meet emergency situations. But the method it used to estimate emergency relief requirements raised suspicion. American officials used the "national food balance" technique to measure food needs in Ethiopia. This approach assumed that food shortages in any part of Ethiopia could be ameliorated by surpluses elsewhere in the country. RRC officials considered

⁴ UNDP, "Summary of A Meeting Held in the UNDP Conference Room With Mr. P.C. Stanissis, Special Advisor to the Legal [sic] Red Cross Societies, and Mr. Brian Wickland, UNDR0," Addis Ababa, 9 March 1976, World Food Programme Archives, Addis Ababa, UNDP File.

the American view that hungry peasants could obtain grain from surplus regions as "theoretical" or false because, according to the RRC, the limited purchasing power of Ethiopian peasants exposed them to death when they failed to produce their own food.⁵

The RRC could not openly tell American officials that its own government controlled the movement of food from one region to another. State restrictions on intra-regional grain trade formed part of the Revolutionary Government's idea of socializing the market.⁶ The restrictions were aimed at flushing private merchants out of the grain trade and creating conditions in which the state Agricultural Marketing Corporation could corner the grain trade and play its role in preventing hunger in the urban areas, the hotbeds of revolution.

By calculating the differences between the estimated food production capacities and the food consumption levels of every region in the country, and by adding the deficits to obtain the national food need, the RRC was able to inflate its food requirements. This method of estimating the national food deficit also overlooked the negative effects of the AMC extraction of food from peasants via the levy of delivery

⁵ RRC, "Comments on the 1986 Emergency Food Need Assessment for Ethiopia Made by Mr. Atwood of USAID," 4 December 1985, RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 2.

⁶ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, p.276.

quotas on the ability of Ethiopian peasants to save enough food for their families or to acquire enough savings to feed themselves. Nevertheless, the RRC hoped that it could use its inflated estimates to build its food security reserve system, fulfil its mandate and avert the negative consequences for its personnel if its leaders failed to prevent famines that killed.⁷.

U.S. officials opposed the food security reserve plan and rejected the RRC's request to the United States in December 1976 for food to relieve an emergency famine situation.-USAID-E and Embassy officials were right in attributing the underlying cause of famine in some parts of Ethiopia, in December 1976, to the problem of distributing available food. Purchases of cereals from Shoa, Arsi, Gojjam, and Gonder by the Ethiopian Government had increased the food stocks of the Ethiopian Grain Corporation by 80,000 MT in 1976 beside the availability of local grains in the warehouses of the AMC.⁸

Moreover, the "bureaucratic procedures which had to be followed. . .to have spare parts sent from Addis Ababa to the regions" prevented the RRC from rehabilitating many of its vehicles for food distribution. USAID-E and UNDP officials also pointed to the continuous use of donated vehicles in

⁷ Shimelis Adugna, RRC Commissioner, to Princeton Lyman, Director of the USAID-E, 24 June 1977, RRC Archives Department, FGU 3/11 "USA."

⁸ RRC, "Food Assistance For New Rehabilitation Sites," 29 December 1976, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, World Food Programme File, Volume 4.

regions where emergency relief work had long ceased.⁹ The "reckless exercise of power by some district officials" often barred the RRC from reassigning donated vehicles to districts where they were badly needed to distribute food.¹⁰

The misuse of donated vehicles and the RRC's food security reserve plan became intensely contested issues between the RRC and the USAID-E. For USAID-E, the food security reserve idea represented an abandonment of the responsibility of the Ethiopian government to eliminate famine by reforming its state farm and collectivization policies. In rejecting the RRC's request for 47,000 MT of American food for 1977, the USAID-E Director, Princeton Lyman, argued:

When emergency relief food distribution is maintained after the emergency as a continuing subsidy--either in food hand-out or food-for-work--the nature of the requirement changes. Much of the demand on [the] RRC today is in the form of these latter programs...Our only reservation about such programs is that they create a dependency among the receiving population...However, if the RRC does identify a specific crisis situation, indicates the action of Government to make available existing supplies to meet these needs, and the need for further outside assistance, the USAID will send an immediate request to Washington for such assistance.¹¹

⁹ World Food Programme, "Drought Relief in Ethiopia: RRC, International Donor Community Food and Logistics Working Group Meeting," Addis Ababa, 29 March 1976, WFP Archives, Addis Ababa, UNDP File.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.7.

¹¹ Princeton Lyman, Director of the USAID-E, to Shimelis Adugna, RRC Commissioner, 30 June 1977, RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/11 "USA."

The desire of the State Department and Congress to keep emergency relief needs and long-term development assistance apart underlay Princeton Lyman's response. It was also triggered by the perception of the USAID-E that the food which the Ethiopian government had so far purchased from surplus regions and the pledges which many donor countries had made to provide food to the RRC should be sufficient to meet any emergency need. The Director of the USAID-E stated that the RRC had surplus stocks of approximately 25,000 MT of grains from the World Food Program (WFP) in April 1977. These surplus stocks did not include "firm pledges" by the European Economic Community (EEC) to offer an additional 10,000 MT of wheat, by France to offer 4,000 MT and by Australia to offer 6,500 MT of wheat to the RRC. The United States had also pledged to deliver 15,000 MT of wheat to Ethiopia through the WFP in 1977.¹² The USAID-E further argued that "the AMC [Agricultural Marketing Corporation] had approximately 112,000 MT of all commodities in its commercial stocks" in March 1977 and had planned to purchase an additional 91,000 MT of wheat and 16,000 MT of maize from the state farms.¹³

¹² Princeton Lyman, Director of the USAID-E, to Shimelis Adugna, RRC Commissioner, Addis Ababa, 14 April 1977, RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/11 "USA." Congestion at Assab port discouraged the World Food Programme from importing 20,000 tonnes of food into Ethiopia in 1977. See CRDA, "Minutes of the 130th General Meeting," 6 March 1978, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, File: 1978.

¹³ Ibid.

The RRC did not deny the claims made by the USAID-E. Given the food at hand, the pledges already received from foreign donors and the Revolutionary Government's objective of building a self-reliant Ethiopia through state farms and collectivized agriculture, the RRC should have appreciated the American suggestion that it avoid institutionalizing relief-aid in Ethiopia. Instead, the American opposition to the food request and the food security reserve plan angered the RRC.

The decision of the Mengistu Government, in June 1977, to withdraw the request it had made in April to purchase 25,000 MT of wheat from the United States strengthened the views of the USAID-E that Ethiopia was not in dire need of food.¹⁴ The Government claimed that "unexpected inflows [of food] from abroad and higher than estimated harvests within Ethiopia" led it to retract the purchase order. USAID-E officials interpreted the retraction as an indication that "the government. . .[did] not see an overall shortage of grain that it. . . [could not] meet from its own or available resources."¹⁵

Developments in American-Ethiopian relations from April to June 1977 played a vital role in the withdrawal of the food purchase request. The U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa had informed the Ethiopian Government, on 21 April 1977, about the

¹⁴ See Princeton Lyman, Director of the USAID-E, to Shimelis Adugna, RRC Commissioner, Addis Ababa, 30 June 1977, RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/11 "USA."

¹⁵ Ibid.

intention of the United States "to begin negotiations to close Kagnew...[the American communication station] by 30 September 1977."¹⁶ In fact senior American officials of the Nixon Administration had informed Haile Sellassie, during the Emperor's visit to Washington in May 1973, that the United States intended to close its base at Kagnew sometime between 1976 and 1978.¹⁷

But the Ethiopian Government abruptly terminated the 1953 agreement which provided base rights at Kagnew for the U.S. military, on 30 April 1977. It ordered the immediate closure of the American base at Kagnew, the American consulate in Asmara, the United States Information Service (USIS), and the U.S. Navy Medical Research Unit (NAMRU), and gave their American staffs four days to leave Ethiopia.¹⁸ Then, the Ethiopian Government went further, asking the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa to reduce the size of its staff by 50 percent.¹⁹ By 30 June 1977, the official American presence in Ethiopia had been drastically reduced "from several hundred men and women to a few dozen."²⁰ In the immediate aftermath of these

¹⁶ See Merahehiwot Gabremariam, "Ethio-U.S. Relations," p.13.

¹⁷ See Terrence Lyons, "Reaction to Revolution," pp. 94-96.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 252-253.

¹⁹ See Merahehiwot Gabremariam, "Ethio-U.S. Relations," p.13.

²⁰ See Terrence Lyons, "Reaction to Revolution," pp.253.

acts, the Revolutionary Government could not have gone immediately ahead with its request to purchase the American food in June 1977.

Limited Concessions Under Mutual Suspicion, 1978-1984

The withdrawal of the food purchase, however, order did not end RRC requests for food from the United States on behalf of its government nor did it stop American officials in Addis Ababa from approving some of the RRC's food requests. Rather, the growing distrust between the Carter Administration and the Mengistu Government caused American aid officials in Addis Ababa to more carefully scrutinize the uses and destinations of American food.²¹

The decision of the Carter administration to weave international human rights into its relations with the Ethiopian Government made U.S. officials in Addis Ababa intensify their inquiries into the causes of famine in revolutionary Ethiopia. By the end of 1978, the Carter Administration had succeeded in focusing its investigation beyond the natural sources of famine to scrutiny of its use as a military tool in Ethiopia's domestic conflict.

The response of the American Ambassador in Ethiopia, Frederick Chapin, to an RRC request for food in 1980 demonstrated the care taken by American officials in Addis

²¹ Col. Adinew Bezabeh, Deputy Commissioner of the RRC, Addis Ababa, to George McCloskey, Ag. Director of the USAID-E, 17 (?) December 1978, RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol.1.

Ababa after 1979 to avoid feeding the Ethiopian army. On instructions from the State Department, Ambassador Frederick Chapin wrote to the RRC in May 1980:

It would...be extremely helpful to my government...if your organization could furnish us with the following historical statistics: 1. production of major food crops in Ethiopia by year and by region for the last ten years...;2. consumption and/or distribution figures for the regions...over the same period; 3. stocks of major food crops on hand nationally as of May 1 or June 1 or any other readily ascertainable...data for the last ten years including the breakdown for the regions affected, if available...;4. imports and exports over the last five years...;5. a detailed foreign exchange analysis showing total imports, exports and foreign exchange reserves since January 1, 1979, to indicate why Ethiopia cannot pay for the required food imports with its own resources....²²

Besides echoing the view which emerged in January 1976 in the State Department and Congress that Ethiopia had the financial ability to feed itself, Ambassador Chapin's letter highlighted official American suspicion in 1979 that much of the food that the RRC obtained did not reach its intended beneficiaries.

Commissioner Shimelis gave a cavalier response:

whether your government will make further assistance available or not unless this information is available is a matter between you and your government. If I am made to understand that you are having problems with our request for humanitarian

²² Frederick L. Chapin, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Shimelis Adugna, RRC Commissioner. 20 May 1980, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 1

assistance, I am ready to refrain from putting any such request to you again.²³

His was a personal overreaction, prompted by an incident unrelated to the subject of the Ambassador's letter or the state of U.S.-Ethiopian relations and the American attempt to keep humanitarian aid and development assistance apart. Commissioner Shimelis took offence at his receipt of Ambassador Chapin's letter several days after various embassies and U.N. agencies had received their copies of it.²⁴ Thus his reaction to what was probably an administrative error at the U.S. Embassy elicited a response which destroyed much of the goodwill that existed between the Embassy and the RRC.

The failure of the RRC to adequately account for the proceeds from the sale of American food in 1978 for the resettlement of displaced people in Bale and Sidamo only worsened the relationship which the American Embassy tried to forge with the RRC. While Ambassador Chapin continued to recommend the approval of some of the RRC's food requests to Washington, he did not hide his disappointment over the RRC's delay in using money which it obtained from the sale of the American food for its intended purposes.²⁵ When American

²³ Shimelis Adugna to Frederick L. Chapin, 31 May 1980, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 1.

²⁴ The author obtained this information in a second, untaped interview with Commissioner Shimelis in Addis Ababa in 1995.

²⁵ Frederick L. Chapin, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, to Shimelis Adugna, RRC Commissioner, 20 May 1980, RRC Archives

auditors reviewed the aid programs of the USAID-E in October 1981, they discovered that:

of the total of 3.84 million Ethiopian Birr generated from monetization of 12,750 MT of U.S. Title II wheat there remain[ed] about 1.64 million Birr to be utilized after almost two years. This amount include[d] 810,000 Birr in the RRC's custody and 829,000 Birr due the RRC from the purchaser [AMC].²⁶

The auditors acknowledged that the RRC headquarters in Addis Ababa had sent the "Ethiopian Birr equivalent of about US \$1m" to Bale. However, "only sketchy records existed to support the expenditures." The auditors further observed that quantities of American Title II food remained in Ethiopian government warehouses in Bale, Sidamo and Wollo for long periods without distribution to their intended beneficiaries. They also revealed that "no food had been issued in over two months...[in Sidamo] because of lack of transport."²⁷ Furthermore, out of a total of 1,771 MT of Instant Corn Soya Milk which the American government donated to Wollo, only 345 MT had been distributed since October 1980.

The improper accounting practices of the RRC and its lax food distribution methods caused the auditors to urge the Embassy to ask the RRC to "promptly utilise" all donated food for its intended purposes and to properly account for the

Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol.1.

²⁶ Owen W. Roberts, Chargé d'Affaires *ad. interim*, U.S. Embassy, to Shimelis Adugna, RRC Commissioner, 9 October 1981, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/27 "USA Agreement."

²⁷ Ibid.

proceeds from the sale of the American food.²⁸ The successor to Ambassador Chapin, Owen Roberts, conveyed this message to the RRC on 17 November 1981.²⁹ On 20 January 1982, Owen Roberts inquired about the Ethiopian Birr equivalent of US \$ 400,000, which the AMC should have paid to the RRC after selling American relief grain.³⁰

RRC delays in the distribution of food and improprieties in accounting for money made the U.S. Embassy lose credibility in supporting RRC food requests to Washington. Although the United States continued to provide food to Ethiopia, it did not provide in 1982 the large volume of assistance that it would give Ethiopia after October 1984. American disappointment over the slow distribution of food and the poorly documented transfers of funds by the RRC in the early 1980s persisted against the background of growing starvation in Ethiopia.³¹ Equally important, the subordination of the activities of the RRC to state security objectives since 1979 almost certainly played a role in the resignation of

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Owen W. Roberts, Chargé d'Affaires, American Embassy, Addis Ababa, to Shimelis Adugna, 17 November 1981, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/27 "USA Agreement."

³⁰ Owen W. Roberts to Shimelis Adugna, 29 January 1982, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 2. See also Michael D. Sellers, AID Affairs Officer, to Yitna Besha, RRC Finance Coordinator, 24 May 1982, RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 2.

³¹ Shimelis Adugna to Owen W. Roberts, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim and Acting AID Representative, 9 August 1980, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 1.

Commissioner Shimelis in 1983. His successor, Dawit Wolde Giorgis, a young army officer of the rank of Major, and a Marxist, was inexperienced in dealing with the international community.³²

If shifts in American views on the roots of famine enabled the United States to justify the use of its food aid as a lever to influence the conduct of the Ethiopian Government, Washington provided an opportunity for the RRC, under Dawit, to contest the distinction which American officials made between humanitarian aid and development assistance.³³ While Commissioner Shimelis dealt directly and often successfully with American officials, Dawit Wolde Giorgis sought to introduce another forum for discussing famine, relief and rehabilitation on behalf of the Ethiopian government. In March 1984, the new RRC Commissioner, instructed the Ethiopian representative at the United Nations, Ambassador Hamid Mohammed, to place the famine in Ethiopia on the agenda of the U.N. General Assembly.³⁴ The new RRC leadership viewed the United Nations as an appropriate forum

³² For more information about the career of Dawit in the Ethiopian army, see Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, pp. 9-10.

³³ See Frederick Chapin, to Shimelis Adugna, 20 May 1980, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 1., and Shimelis Adugna to Frederick L. Chapin, 31 May 1980, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 1.

³⁴ Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, RRC Commissioner, Telex to Ambassador Hamid Mohammed, Ethiopian Representative at the United Nations, 24 March 1984, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol.2.

for achieving two objectives: (1) it enabled the RRC to broaden its quest for relief for the development of Ethiopia's economy, and (2) it provided Ethiopia with a forum in which the Government could enlist the support of its allies against the United States in the looming debate over the roots of famine in Ethiopia.

Under a military commissioner, the views of the RRC about the causes of famine in Ethiopia and the information it received and gave out to foreign donors about the food situation in the country reflected the political objectives of the military government. By asking Ambassador Hamid Mohammed to list food, medicine, vehicles, water drilling machines and medical facilities as Ethiopia's foremost needs in the fight against famine, Commissioner Dawit hoped to convince many U.N. member states to view the famine in Ethiopia as a development problem rather than as a man-made disaster caused by the socialist agricultural policies of the Revolutionary Government.³⁵ As part of its efforts to internationalise the domestic famine problem, the RRC constructed its need for aid to combat famine and starvation as a human rights issue which called for the support of Ethiopia's long-term solutions by all genuine advocates of human rights.

³⁵ Ibid. See also Habte Mariam Ayenachew, Deputy Commissioner of the RRC, to Ethiopia-Mission at New York, "RE: Information on Drought Condition in Ethiopia," 5 May 1983, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol.2.

The U.S. and Famine Relief in Ethiopia, 1984-1987

Divergent opinions about how to respond to growing starvation in Ethiopia emerged in the U.S. Congress. On 11 August 1983, Congressman Howard Wolpe (D-Michigan), Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Africa, led an eight-member Congressional delegation on a fact-finding visit to Ethiopia. The delegation visited "the drought-stricken parts of. . . Gondar region" and met with officials of the RRC and representatives of major foreign relief agencies in Addis Ababa.³⁶

After observing the situation in Ethiopia, the Wolpe delegation released a press statement which announced that "at least one million" people in Ethiopia faced imminent death from starvation in the summer of 1983. They also acknowledged the alarming rate at which children were dying in the-famine-stricken regions. The delegates recommended that Congress allocate "at least 50,000 MT of additional food" to Ethiopia and pay for rough terrain trucks, trailers, spare parts and the distribution of food by air to needy places before November 1983.³⁷

On 27 June 1984, Congressman Wolpe asked the Ethiopian Ambassador to the United States, Tamene Eshete, to help

³⁶ U.S. Congressional Delegation, Press Release, "U.S. Congressional Delegation Warns Thousand Face Death in Ethiopian Famine Unless American and International Donors Increase Relief Assistance Immediately," 11 August 1983, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," vol.2.

³⁷ Ibid.

Congress to assess the nature and impact of the "drought" in Ethiopia "with precision."³⁸ His request to the Ethiopian ambassador for more precise data, despite the Embassy despatches and AID and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) studies on the situation in Ethiopia that were available to the Congressmen, revealed the underlying concerns in Washington that Ethiopian officials were concealing vital information ³⁹

The refinement of the Imperial legacy of censorship by the Revolutionary Government debarred the RRC from citing state policy and government military strategies as causes of famine and starvation in Ethiopia. The RRC's opportunistic approach to the discussion of famine in Ethiopia provided American officials with justification for insisting on detailed information and precise data for interpreting conditions in Ethiopia. Furthermore, starvation in the midst of civil war and a socialist revolution directed by an anti-American government in Addis Ababa raised political and ethical questions in Congress. Although the Reagan Administration, which came to power in 1981, was under

³⁸ Howard Wolpe, Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Africa, U.S. Congress, to Tamene Eshete, Ethiopian Ambassador to the United States, Embassy of Ethiopia, Washington, D.C., 27 June 1984, RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 2.

³⁹ See Howard Wolpe, Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Africa, U.S. Congress, to Tamene Eshete, Ethiopian Ambassador to the United States, Embassy of Ethiopia, Washington, D.C., 27 June 1984, RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," vol. 2.

pressure from humanitarian groups to reach some accommodation with the regime in Addis Ababa, the American decision to respond favourably to requests for famine aid to Ethiopia was not made until October 1984. When it did provide aid, the United States gave about 500,000 MT of food and other assistance worth about a billion dollars to relieve the lethal famine.⁴⁰

The American decision to provide huge quantities of famine-aid to Ethiopia began to take shape in the spring and summer of 1984 against the unfavourable background of "hard and bitter" feelings in Washington.⁴¹ AID officials found completely irresponsible government preparations to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Ethiopian revolution in September 1984, amid mass deaths from starvation in Ethiopia. Such conduct by the Ethiopian Government served as a great disincentive to a rapid American response. Furthermore, since Washington perceived Ethiopia as a communist country and a Soviet ally, some American policy-makers expected the Soviet Union to come to the aid of its satellite state.⁴² Moreover, the Reagan Administration initially believed that the Mengistu government would distribute American food according to the political allegiance of the recipients, use the external

⁴⁰ Peter McPherson, "The Ethiopian Famine in the Mid-1980's," Paper Presented to the Ethiopian Conference at Michigan State University, Fall 1994, pp.2 and 9.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

assistance to control the movement of people and divert substantial portions of the food to its soldiers. According to AID administrator Peter McPherson, these considerations made "the case...[of assisting Ethiopia] hard to sell...[in Washington]." ⁴³

Two views about American assistance existed within AID. While the head of the Food for Peace Program, Julia Block, favoured American relief assistance to Ethiopia, the AID policy office sternly opposed it. Television images of mass death from starvation in Ethiopia, and detailed information on the magnitude of the famine from the U.S. Catholic Relief Services office in Addis Ababa, began to give the proponents of U.S. assistance the advantage within the AID. However, the support of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Treasury Department, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the State Department was required to clear the way for any U.S. response. ⁴⁴ Certain members of Congress and some State Department officials wanted to delay American assistance hoping that mass starvation would precipitate rebellion against the Revolutionary Government just as it had fuelled the assault on the Haile Sellassie regime in 1974. ⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ The author has preserved the confidentiality of the source of this information, a senior official within the U.S. Government at the time the problem was under review.

However, the horrific media images of mass death from starvation at Korem, Bati and Makelle in Ethiopia, which saturated American television newscasts in September 1984, gave the AID administrator, Peter McPherson, the leverage he needed to press the White House for a Presidential intervention in the policy-making impasse. Here television had a profound impact on decision-making. When President Reagan, a television enthusiast, watched the horrifying images, he ordered an immediate American intervention. Presidential intervention also overcame the OMB's opposition to the allocation of any more funds to relieve famine in Ethiopia greatly in excess of the \$ 20 million which the U.S. had provided in the summer of 1984.⁴⁶

On its part, the Ethiopian Government resorted to equivocation and self-praise to mask its embarrassment at having to accept American food assistance on America's terms. When AID administrator Peter McPherson complained in March 1984 to a U.S. Senate Committee about the clumsy response of the Ethiopian Government to lethal famine in Ethiopia, the RRC Commissioner, Major Dawit Wolde Giorgis, went on the offensive.⁴⁷ He defended his government's "contribution" to the prevention and alleviation of famine and expressed

⁴⁶ Peter McPherson, "The Ethiopian Famine in the Mid-1980's," p.4.

⁴⁷ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, RRC Commissioner, to Joseph P. O'Neil, Counsellor of the U.S. Embassy, 24 September 1984, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 2.

"indignation" at the chastisement by the AID administrator.⁴⁸ Dawit's reaction masked the inadequate support which his Commission received from the Ethiopian Government to alleviate the famine.⁴⁹

Undoubtedly, the RRC operated under greater pressure from the government after the resignation of the civilian Commissioner Shimelis Adugna in 1983. Senior officials of the RRC asked foreign aid agencies "not to get offended if...[the] RRC [wrote] strong letters from time to time in. . .[discharging] its responsibility" since, as the officials put it, "the RRC is neither the decision making body nor the government."⁵⁰ However, Dawit's spirited defence of his government and the abusive tone of some of his letters to the American Embassy, and later to the U.S. Relief Coordinator, Fred Fischer, suggest that Major Dawit played a negative role in the famine-creation process and the politics that

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ See Working Group, "Report of the Working Group on Relief Assistance, n.d., WFP Archives, Addis Ababa, Incoming Cables April-July 1985. The Working group consisted of five representatives from the foreign donor community in Addis Ababa.

⁵⁰ See Yemi Sebsibe, Information Officer of the U.S. Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Addis Ababa, to Francis X. Carlin, Director of the CRS, "Minutes of NGOs Meeting With Commissioner Dawit W/Georgis," 22 July 1985, CRS Archives, Addis Ababa, Program/Grant, No.20.

characterized the Ethiopian relief effort despite his efforts to clear his name in his book, Red Tears.⁵¹

"A Hungry Child Knows No Politics"

The Reagan Administration sidestepped its political differences with the Ethiopian government to help the Ethiopian people in October 1984. The phrase, "A Hungry Child Knows No Politics," served as the guidepost for the official American response to the famine. AID administrator Peter McPherson used this phrase, attributed to a "citizen's lobbying organization," *Bread For the World*, to present the AID's case for assistance to President Reagan.⁵² But the United States could not relieve famine in Ethiopia without the help of the Ethiopian government on matters such as the issuance of visas to American personnel and permission for the United States to land its relief planes and use Ethiopia's seaports. The Mengistu government did not cooperate with the United

⁵¹ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears, pp. 336-330. See also Dawit Wolde Giorgis, RRC Commissioner, to Joseph P. O'Neil, Counsellor of the American Embassy in Ethiopia, 24 September 1984, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 2., Dawit Wolde Giorgis, to Fred Fischer, U.S. Relief Coordinator, 15 May 1985, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26, "USA AID," Vol 2.

⁵² Mark Duffield and John Prendergast, Without Troops and Tanks, p.63. See also Peter McPherson, "The Ethiopian Famine in the Mid-1980's," p.4., and author's tape interviews with David Korn, American Chargé d'Affaires in Ethiopia during the 1984 famine, Washington, D.C., 26 October 1994 and with Fred Fischer, Coordinator of the American Relief Operation in Ethiopia, Nairobi, Kenya, 22 June 1995.

States as much as it should have on these matters, as we will later see.

To resolve the ethical and political problems of assisting the hungry without aiding the Ethiopian Government and its soldiers, the Reagan Administration decided to participate in international relief operations in Ethiopia but only on its own terms. The State Department instructed Chargé d'Affaires David Korn to inform the Mengistu government about the conditions under which the United States would give famine aid to Ethiopia. David Korn asked the Ethiopian Government on 17 October 1984 to agree to the following:

[a]ssignment of full-time U.S. personnel to supervise the U.S. [relief] program..., as well as additional field monitors to oversee distribution... These personnel would be over and above the current limit of 28 maintained by the Government of Ethiopia for the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa.

concurrence that these personnel will have freedom of travel and access through all areas where food programs are being carried out.

provision by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission to all donors of full information on Ethiopian food and related-non-food relief needs,... on available supplies in Ethiopia, pledges from donors, and other pertinent matters; and agreement to establish regular mechanisms for the exchange of information and views with the USG [U.S. Government] and other donors on disaster relief developments.

assurance that the Government of Ethiopia will accord emergency food and non-food assistance priority for resources and logistic support such as port clearances,....

Assurance of full cooperation by the Government of Ethiopia in making emergency food assistance available to all needy areas.

Acceptance that the United States Government will retain

audit rights and that the Government of Ethiopia will implement [the relief] program in accordance with USAID regulation[s]....⁵³

The American request for assurance that emergency food assistance would be distributed to "all needy areas" reflected official American views, bolstered by propaganda from anti-government groups, that the Ethiopian Government intentionally starved particular groups and regions in Ethiopia.⁵⁴ To ensure that the hungry enjoyed their right to relief food amid the suspicion that the Mengistu Government would use it as a political tool, the Reagan Administration provided only 40,000 MT of wheat and 10,000 MT of Corn Soy-Milk to the RRC.⁵⁵

The conduct of the American response to famine in Ethiopia as a humanitarian mission enabled the anti-communist Reagan Administration to justify its assistance to the anti-American regime in Ethiopia to the American public and Congress. At the National Security Council (NSC), experts also thought it would afford the U.S. the opportunity to use American aid as a lever to extract political concessions from

⁵³ David A. Korn, Chargé d'Affaires of the U.S. Embassy in Ethiopia, to Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, RRC Commissioner, 17 October 1984, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/27 "USA Agreement."

⁵⁴ See Peter McPherson, "The Ethiopian Famine in the-Mid-1980's," Paper Presented to the Ethiopian Conference at Michigan State University, Fall 1994, p.2.

⁵⁵ Fred Fischer, "Briefing Book." Also see Author's tape interview with Fred Fischer, Coordinator of the American Relief Operation in Ethiopia, Nairobi, Kenya, 22 June 1995.

the Ethiopian government.⁵⁶ But as Christopher Clapham, the British political scientist, has observed, far from becoming an opportunity which could be used to guide the conduct of the Mengistu government, Mengistu used the American relief operation to buttress his domestic political and economic power.

The Ethiopian Government demanded port fees that were "well above...international fees...."⁵⁷ The Reagan Administration paid US \$12.60 for offloading every ton of American relief at Ethiopia's ports "with great reluctance," but felt it "had no option" to do otherwise given its commitment to preventing innocent Ethiopians from starving needlessly.⁵⁸ Apart from paying exorbitant port fees, the U.S. government paid for the distribution of relief food within Ethiopia.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ See National Security Council Directive No. 57, "U.S. Policy Toward Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti, Kenya, and Ethiopia," in Christopher Simpson, ed., National Security Directives of the Reagan and Bush Administrations: The Declassified History of U.S. Political and Military Policy, 1981-1991 (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995), p. 76.

⁵⁷ Peter McPherson, "The Ethiopian Famine in the Mid-1980s," p.7.

⁵⁸ Ibid. See also Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearings Before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organization, International Economic Policy and Trade and on Africa, 100th Congress, 1st Session, 15 September 1987 and 21 October 1987, p.33.

⁵⁹ Author's tape interviews with Ahmed Ali, former Head of Aid Coordination and International Relations at the RRC, Addis Ababa, 16 May 1995 and with Fred Fischer, U.S. Relief Coordinator in Ethiopia during the 1984 famine, Nairobi, Kenya, 21 June 1995.

For its part, the Mengistu government tried to ensure that the help it received from the United States, and other external donors, did not weaken the Ethiopian state.⁶⁰ Stephen Varnis characterizes the deliberate obstructions which the Ethiopian government placed in the way of American relief officials as creating the American dilemma of how to aid a government to relieve the lethal famine which it caused through its "communistic policies."⁶¹ Above all, the Ethiopian Government used the American humanitarian program as another opportunity to intensify its anti-American stance. Assuming the cynical position that advocates of human rights bore greater responsibility to relieve famine and starvation in poor countries such as Ethiopia, RRC Commissioner Dawit Wolde Giorgis found it reasonable to "warn" the United States and the "international community" of their "moral responsibility" to give more famine aid to Ethiopia.

On the morning of 8 October 1984, Chargé d'Affaires of the American Embassy David Korn walked out of a donor's meeting convened by the RRC in Addis Ababa because of such remarks by Commissioner Dawit. On the afternoon of the same day, Dawit apologized to Korn for the manner in which he had

⁶⁰ See Christopher Clapham, Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia, p.194 and Reginald Herbold Green, "Post-Famine Challenges and the Role of the International Community," Unpublished Paper Presented at the Symposium on Famine in Ethiopia: Learning From the Past to Prepare for the Future, Africa Hall, Addis Ababa, 15-18 March 1995.

⁶¹ Stephen Varnis, Reluctant Aid or Aiding the Reluctant, p.143.

presented Ethiopia's case for American famine aid. Dawit argued that he felt obliged "to spread the alarm...in the strongest possible terms" because he believed that "the United States has the capacity to do more...." He argued that his:

statement which referred particularly to the United States was our own way of creating pressure to get more and was never intended to provoke you...or in any way be ungrateful of [sic] the assistance which we have received so far.⁶²

Dawit characterized his provocative relief diplomacy as "a strong humanitarian investigation."⁶³ What he meant to emphasize was the hypocrisy of American human rights diplomacy in Ethiopia, especially the unwillingness of the United States to provide development assistance to the Ethiopian Government. His "humanitarian investigations" were so frequent and irresponsible that they did constitute a rejection of his government's responsibility to prevent and relieve famine in Ethiopia and a transferral of Ethiopia's responsibilities onto the shoulders of the United States. Dawit Wolde Giorgis and Mengistu Haile Mariam seemed more interested in winning the civil war and sacrificing the lives of Ethiopians in a political debate with the United States than in aiding the victims of war and famine.

⁶² Dawit Wolde-Giorgis to David Korn, 8 October 1984, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol.2.

⁶³ Ibid.

AID administrator Peter McPherson has admitted that "it wasn't just the Ethiopian government that was a problem out there, but the rebels as well."⁶⁴ However, American silence over how anti-Government movements used the food which the United States provided struck the RRC and the Ethiopian government as subtle U.S. support for the EPLF and TPLF. Contrary to official Ethiopian perceptions, the Marxist and "communist" inclinations of the TPLF and EPLF made them as unattractive to the Reagan administration as the Ethiopian government.⁶⁵

Famine, American Response and Empowerment in Ethiopia

All parties in the Ethiopian civil war saw the American relief operation as offering moral and diplomatic tools for waging their war. Events in Ethiopia after October 1984 illuminated the many ways in which they used famine and the American and international relief operations, to manipulate human rights principles. The Mengistu Government stretched American demands that food be distributed to "all needy areas" to accommodate its own desire that food be distributed to "all needy people."⁶⁶ With that interpretation of the right to food

⁶⁴ Peter McPherson, "The Ethiopian Famine in the Mid-1980's," p.7.

⁶⁵ Author's tape interview with Fred Fischer, Coordinator of the U.S. Relief Operation in Ethiopia, Nairobi, Kenya, 21 June 1995.

⁶⁶ See Taye Gurmu, Deputy RRC Commissioner, to Desmond Taylor, Deputy Representative of the World Food Program, 11

in the context of the civil war and famine in Ethiopia, the Mengistu Government ordered the RRC to divert food to areas in which the potential for rebellion was imminent.

Mengistu tried to court American support by labelling the TPLF and EPLF as terrorist organizations in an interview with Brian Stewart of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in 1985.⁶⁷ The Ethiopian leader could have used that opportunity to emphasize how the insurgent movements also contributed to famine. Instead he labelled them as "terrorists...whose activities have interfered with people's ability to produce and feed themselves" without demonstrating how they helped to create the starvation situation.⁶⁸ His characterization seems to have been aimed at whipping up support for his government in a global environment of anxiety about terrorism.

The TPLF and EPLF succeeded in interpreting mass death from starvation in Ethiopia as the result of a deliberate policy of starvation by the Mengistu government.⁶⁹ Unlike the

February 1985, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, WFP Aid.

⁶⁷ See Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, "Interview With Ethiopia's Head of State," 27 February 1985, World Food Programme Archives, Addis Ababa, Incoming Cables April-July 1985. See also Taye Gurm, Deputy RRC Commissioner, to Brother Augustine O'Keefe, Coordinator of the Christian Relief and Development Agency, (CRDA), 26 September 1984, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa. RRC Files, -January-April 1985.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ See Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb, Politics and the Ethiopian Famine, 1984-1985, p.44 and John Prendergast and Mark Duffield, "Liberation Politics and External Engagement in Ethiopia and Eritrea," p.3.

Mengistu government, they partially succeeded in gaining the attention of the American government for their charges of human rights violations. The Western donor agencies in Addis Ababa believed the claims of the TPLF and EPLF that the Ethiopian government accepted American relief assistance chiefly in the hope of obtaining food and money to pay its soldiers and buy armaments.⁷⁰

Their allegations that the Ethiopian government re-exported American and other international relief food to acquire arms from the Soviet Union were never proven, but were vigorously investigated by the Reagan administration. Although the Special Presidential Commission which the United States established to investigate the allegation in September 1985 found no evidence of a deliberate state policy of starvation in Ethiopia, it did not allay official American suspicion that the Ethiopian government pursued such a policy.⁷¹

American criticism of the Revolutionary Government for distributing food according to political allegiance was not misplaced. But what escaped American officials, in their views of events in Ethiopia in the 1980s, was that creating dependence on relief food distributed by their relief organs was a political strategy which all the warring parties in

⁷⁰ Mark Duffield and John Prendergast, Without Troops and Tanks, p.42.

⁷¹ Ibid., p.64.

Ethiopia used.⁷² The seizures of the farm tools of peasants and the destruction of their means of subsistence, which Robert Kaplan, Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb have documented, were aimed at making people dependent on government food relief networks, not on deliberately starving them to death.⁷³

As we have already observed, all sides in the war used relief food to recruit and reward soldiers as well as to broaden and consolidate political loyalties. They also destroyed food convoys when it helped to facilitate their political and military objectives. As the controller of the state machinery, the Government also used American relief supplies to keep control of the population in the areas it occupied.

American concentration on government abuses of relief resources inadvertently spared the insurgent groups from blame for the same offence of using famine and the food they obtained through the Cross-Border-Operation as military tools to weaken state influence on the inhabitants of contested regions. Consequently, genuine American criticisms of the

⁷² Author's tape interviews with Dessalegn Rahmato, Researcher at Addis Ababa University, 19 March 1995 and with Taye Gurmu, ex-Deputy Commissioner of the RRC, Addis Ababa, 31 October 1995.

⁷³ Author's tape interviews with a group of 12 peasants at Kutaber, in Kutaber woreda, North Wollo Administrative Region, 20 October 1995 and with Taye Gurmu, ex-Deputy Commissioner of the RRC, Addis Ababa, 31 October 1995. See also Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb, Politics and the Ethiopian Famine, 1984-85, pp. 44-45, -192-193; Robert Kaplan, Surrender or Starve, pp.7, 19.

Ethiopian government acquired a pro-TPLF and EPLF effect that the U.S. government did not intend. Anti-government movements exiled in the United States also stepped up their efforts to exaggerate government culpability in the hope of securing American support.⁷⁴ The successful manipulation of American views of events in Ethiopia by the EPLF and TPLF gave them a de-facto legitimacy that complicated negotiations and the possibilities for compromise between them and the Government. The determination of the Government and the liberation fronts to fight to victory intensified famine and starvation in Ethiopia even in the midst of the American effort to relieve it.

By refusing to recognize the de-facto control that the anti-government liberation fronts exercised over the territories they dominated, the Mengistu government theoretically made itself the sole arbiter of international humanitarian access to any place in the country.⁷⁵ But despite its obstructive behaviour and the position it adopted that no foreign government or personnel should have any contact with anti-government groups and their supporters, the Mengistu

⁷⁴ See "Prepared Statement of the Ethiopian National Alliance To Advance Democracy [ENATAD]," in Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearings Before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organization, International Economic Policy and Trade and on Africa, 100th Congress, 1st Session, 15 September 1987 and 21 October 1987.

⁷⁵ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, "Interview With Ethiopia's Head of State," 27 February 1985, World Food Programme Archives, Addis Ababa, Incoming Cables April-July 1985.

government showed that it was vulnerable to international opinion. The invocation of what it considered to be the sovereign right of the state to oppose unauthorized relief activities in areas outside its control hid the readiness of the Revolutionary Government to permit American and other international assistance in areas under the control of the TPLF and EPLF if it was discreet and non-political.⁷⁶ Mengistu was aware of the unpublicized "delivery of food across the border from Sudan to rebel-held areas of the North" by the USAID Mission to Sudan.⁷⁷

In the Ethiopian civil war in which both government and anti-government forces claimed victory, unpublicized American assistance to anti-Government political groups gave the impression that the Government was in firm control of the country. On their part, anti-Government groups sought and encouraged a visible American and international presence in the areas they controlled as indications of their hegemony. More important, they viewed American relief operations in their domains as conferring legitimacy on them or as indicating tacit American recognition of their causes and military gains.

⁷⁶ Mark Duffield and John Prendergast, Without Troops and Tanks, p.49.

⁷⁷ See Peter McPherson, "The Ethiopian Famine in the-Mid-1980's," Paper Presented to the Ethiopian Conference at Michigan State University, Fall 1994, p.2.

Resettlement, Counter-Insurgency and the Development Debate

The Mengistu government undertook its post-1984 resettlement programme partly in response to its losses on the battlefield and the growing international disaffection with it. Obviously, counter-insurgency motives were present in the high degree to which the Government perceived the American and the international relief operations as empowering the insurgent groups. However, over-concentration on the search for counter-insurgency motives within the resettlement programme overlooks what resettlement tells us about the state of the Mengistu government in 1984, the impact of the American and the international relief operations on the government and how the government sought to use resettlement to renegotiate its relations with the United States.

Resettlement in Ethiopia from 1984 to 1986 was a hasty, poorly organized and reactive policy of an incompetent government already on its death bed. In domestic politics, the personal interest which Mengistu showed in resettlement after October 1984 transformed it into a means of defining supporters and opponents of his government. But in the politics of famine-relief in U.S.-Ethiopian relations, resettlement provided yet another terrain for the struggle between the Ethiopian and American governments. As we noted in chapter six, besides suspending its bilateral development assistance to Ethiopia, the United States opposed multi-lateral loans to the Ethiopian government. Therefore, with

very little left to lose, sacrificing Ethiopians to kindle a debate which might show that development aid was the essential missing element for a successful resettlement program seemed attractive to the Mengistu government.⁷⁸

American policy to stop the resettlement and villagization programs, which it perceived as inhumane measures designed to win a civil war rather than to feed people, inevitably brought it into conflict with the Ethiopian government. U.S. criticism of the resettlement program centred on the forced transportation of the weak and dying to unhealthy resettlement camps. Unlike 1978 when they provided food and funds for the resettlement of people in Bale and Sidamo, the American officials in Addis Ababa prohibited the RRC from distributing American donated food and relief supplies to people in resettlement sites in 1984. To enforce that policy, AID hired eight monitors from CARE-India to watch the movement of American food within Ethiopia.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ See Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Commissioner of the RRC, Addis Ababa, to H.E. Olivero Rossi, Ambassador of Italy to Socialist Ethiopia, 12 December 1984, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, Food Security Reserve Project File No. P 27/14; RRC, "A Frustrated Cry:" Official Response to MSF-France," 3 October 1986, Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) Archives, Addis Ababa, RRC Files IL 2/2, Feb. 1986-August 1987; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "RE: Ethio-American Relations Now and Then," Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Addis Ababa.

⁷⁹ Fred Fischer, "Briefing Book" and Author's Tape Interview with Fred Fischer, Nairobi, Kenya, 21 June 1995. Also see Fred C. Fischer, AID Representative in Addis Ababa, to Desmond Taylor, Deputy Director of the World Food Programme, Addis Ababa, 17 January 1985, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, WFP AID File.

Whereas the Ethiopian government claimed that it honored human rights principles by diverting relief food to its soldiers and the inhabitants of resettlement camps, it refused to accept American assertions that its forced resettlement campaign violated the dignity of the people the government resettled. The government misconstrued the defence of abused groups in the resettlement programme by the United States and foreign human rights groups as designed to boost the morale of its political opponents.⁸⁰

When the French human rights group, *Médecines Sans Frontières* (MSF-France), compared the resettlement process to the Holocaust and the genocide in Cambodia in a confidential report which was leaked to the Wall Street Journal, the Ethiopian government reacted in a manner which revealed the other intentions of its post-1984 resettlement policy.⁸¹ In a letter to the Editor of the Wall Street Journal, dated 31 January 1986, the Deputy Commissioner of the RRC, Berhane Deressa, argued that:

additional international support for the programme will...make its implimentation [sic] less painful and more humane.... However, criticism...without an offer of viable alternatives for the drought

⁸⁰ Author's interview with Tesfaye Mekasha Amare, ex-Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Imperial Regime, Addis Ababa, 30 July 1995.

⁸¹ See *Médecines Sans Frontières* (France), "Mass Deportations in Ethiopia," *Confidential Report*, December 1985, pp.51, 65; Wall Street Journal, "Today's Holocaust," 27 January 1986; Berhane Deressa, RRC Commissioner, to Editor, Wall Street Journal, 31 January 1986, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, RRC Reports and Minutes January-December 1985.

victims will only serve the purpose and interest of the critic [and] not the cause of humanity.⁸²

In the "official statement" which the RRC issued on 3 October 1986, it asked:

Did MSF-F envision a permanent camp populated by aid-dependent inhabitants for an indefinite period or should one be led to conclude that MSF-F seems to derive sadistic pleasure from the prolongation of the agony of our people?⁸³

Certainly, international media exposure of death from starvation played a role in the launching of the post-1984 resettlement programme by a government which seized power with a pledge to eradicate famine. If resettlement was meant to disguise the Mengistu government's failures and incompetence, it only succeeded in exposing them. But if it undertook the programme partly to divide international opinion about its revolution and reignite the debate on development assistance to Ethiopia, the resettlement policy achieved those objectives.

The post-1984 resettlement exercise caused a significant division of international opinion about how to make resettlement work in Ethiopia. The Canadian, Italian and Australian governments viewed resettlement as a long-term

⁸² Berhane Deressa, Deputy RRC Commissioner, to The Editor, The Wall Street Journal, 31 January 1986, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, *RRC Reports and Minutes*, Jan.-Dec. 1985.

⁸³ Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, "A Frustrated-Out-Cry," 3 October 1986, Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) Archives, Addis Ababa, *File No. 1L 2/2 (RRC) Feb. 1986-Aug. 1987*.

response to famine and supported it financially.⁸⁴ The United Nations Office for Emergency Operations in Ethiopia (UNOEOE) dismissed the MSF-F comparison of the resettlement programme to the Holocaust and the Cambodian genocide as "totally incorrect."⁸⁵ These pronouncements by Washington's international partners changed American policy on long-term development assistance to Ethiopia.

Linking Relief With Rehabilitation, 1985-91

Concern for the hungry led the Reagan administration to revise American policy towards the "communist" government in Addis Ababa. The African Famine Relief and Recovery Act, which Congress passed in May 1985, enabled the RRC and American private voluntary organizations in Ethiopia to use American food and relief resources to support medium-term development projects.⁸⁶ The U.S. government provided seeds, basic agricultural tools, oxen and agricultural chemicals to

⁸⁴ Peter McPherson, "The Ethiopian Famine in the Mid-1980s," p.9. See also Kurt Jansson, "The Emergency Relief Operation," in Kurt Jansson, Michael Harris and Angela Penrose, The Ethiopian Famine, pp.64-69., and Médecines sans Frontières (France), "Mass Deportations in Ethiopia," *Confidential Report*, December 1985, p.57.

⁸⁵ Terry Kirch, Desk Officer of the UNOEOE, "Summary of OEOE Meeting," 3 February 1986, CRS Archives, Addis Ababa, Program/Grant File No.20.

⁸⁶ See Fred C. Fischer, U.S. Coordinator for Emergency Relief, to Frank X. Carlin, Director of the U.S. Catholic Relief Services, 8 May 1985, CRS Archives, Addis Ababa, *USAID File No 511*.

peasants in May 1985.⁸⁷ Fred Fischer worked closely with the AMC, the Ethiopian Seed Corporation and peasant associations to obtain approximately 7,870 MT of local seeds valued at 6.62 million Ethiopian Birr for peasants in FY 1986.⁸⁸ American relief officials also permitted the RRC to use American food as income for work on the construction of roads and dams in Wollo, Tigray, Eritrea and Gondar in July 1985 despite the official American position that the Ethiopian government should finance its own long-term development programs.⁸⁹

Through the American and other international relief operations, the Ethiopian government and the RRC accumulated sufficient food to augment the food supply of Addis Ababa and to assuage the sagging spirits of government soldiers. The RRC frequently loaned food to the AMC to prevent food shortages in the capital and other urban areas from precipitating rebellions as the government lost military ground to its domestic opponents in 1985. The AMC never returned most of the food it took from the RRC.⁹⁰

American relief coordinator Fred Fischer expressed his

⁸⁷ Fred Fischer, "FY 1985 Operational Support Grant," in Briefing Book.

⁸⁸ Fred Fischer, "FY 1986 Food For Seed Program," in Briefing Book.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ RRC Food Security Reserve, "Minutes of the Technical Meeting of the FSR [Food Security Reserve] Held on 12 August 1985," RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, Food Security Reserve Project File No. P27/14.

concern about the RRC's higher relief estimates and its diversion of food to groups for whom it was not originally intended. In responding, Commissioner Dawit expressed his dismay at finding Fred Fischer's "letters...vibrant with an aura of cynicism and suspicion...."⁹¹ Dawit's argument that "the only moral criteria that qualified needy people for...relief assistance was need" disguised the complicity of the RRC in the widespread diversion of food to soldiers and urban areas.⁹²

Given these incidents, the Reagan Administration was justified in channelling a substantial portion of official American relief aid to Ethiopia to American private voluntary organizations.⁹³ However, this approach to famine relief had its own contradictions. In many cases, food arriving in Ethiopia was already earmarked for certain regions or to particular NGOs which operated in specific areas under defined mandates.⁹⁴ The RRC protested the allocation of large

⁹¹ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, RRC Commissioner, to Mr. Fred Fischer, U.S. Coordinator for Emergency Relief, 15 May 1985, RRC Archives Division, FGU 3/26 "USA AID," Vol. 2, p.6.

⁹² Ibid. See also RRC Food Security Reserve, "Minutes of the Technical Meeting of the FSR [Food Security Reserve] Held on 12 August 1985," RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, Food Security Reserve Project File No. P27/14.

⁹³ American private voluntary organizations which helped to distribute American relief food in Ethiopia included Africare, Food For The Hungry, the Helen Keller Foundation, InterAction, SCF-USA, CRS and CARE.

⁹⁴ Author's tape interview with Willet Weeks, Head of Save the Children Federation (USA), Addis Ababa, 18 May 1995.

consignments of food to particular administrative regions. It often diverted some of the food "to permit distribution in any of the drought affected areas," a code-phrase which also allowed the RRC to provide food to urban areas, government soldiers and resettlement villages.⁹⁵

The efforts which the RRC made to supply food to people who were really in need in remote parts of Ethiopia and under threats of attack from the EPLF and TPLF earned it praise from American officials and other UN civil servants who had often criticized the RRC.⁹⁶ The shield of those commendations helped the RRC and the Mengistu regime to deflect accusations that they often distributed food according to political allegiance and diverted food to government soldiers.

Famine was almost eliminated in Ethiopia by May 1986. Some feeding camps were virtually empty by the end of 1986. The domestic military conflict, however, continued to affect agricultural activities and the food supply situation in northern Ethiopia. Nevertheless, the large quantities of

⁹⁵ Berhane Deressa, Deputy Commissioner of the RRC, to Desmond Taylor, World Food Programme, 9 February 1985, RRC Archives Division, Addis Ababa, WFP Aid File No. 3130, Vol. 3.

⁹⁶ See Peter McPherson, "The Ethiopian Famine in the-Mid-1980's," p.9., "Statement by Mr. M. Priestley, UN Resident Coordinator and Chairman of the UN Emergency Prevention and Preparedness Group to the RRC's Regular Donors Meeting for 1987 held in Addis Ababa....," 15 January 1987, FAO Archives, Addis Ababa, File No. IL 2/2 (RRC) Feb.1986-Aug.1987., RRC, "RRC to Deliver Relief to North from Assab," *Official Release*, 1 March 1990, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, RRC Files, June 1-Dec. 1990; RRC, "The Unfolding of the EPLF's Treacherous Acts," *Official Release*, 30 July 1990, CRDA Archives, Addis Ababa, RRC Files, June 1-Dec. 1990.

donated food in the country, the excellent relief infrastructure that was built after 1984 and the American-financed seed and farm implements programme in Ethiopia prevented food shortages in Tigray, Eritrea and other parts of the country, between 1987 and 1991, from developing into mass starvation of the magnitude seen in September 1984.⁹⁷

Conclusion

The Ethiopian government and its armed opponents integrated the American response to famine in Ethiopia into their political and military strategies. As a result, the United States never obtained an accurate picture of the magnitude of famine and its causes, or the uses of American food in revolutionary Ethiopia, between 1975 and 1984. Government claims of a bountiful supply of food served to foster an image of a successful "socialist revolution," while inflated food needs, laced with carefully constructed interpretations, enhanced the accumulation of resources by the government and its opponents in their struggle for power.

The United States wove international human rights into its framework for relieving famine in Ethiopia and for dealing with the Ethiopian government. The Mengistu government, in turn, used and interpreted the human rights framework to suit

⁹⁷ Food and Agricultural Organization, "FAO Crop Assessment Mission to Ethiopia," *Special Report*, 15 December 1988, United Nations Emergency Office for Ethiopia (UNEOE) Archives, Addis Ababa.

its political, military and diplomatic objectives. But notwithstanding their ideological differences, and the atmosphere of hostility in which they forged their uneasy partnership to save lives threatened by famine in Ethiopia, the anti-socialist American government and the socialist-anti-American regime in Addis Ababa found a common ground for action. Their efforts to accommodate each other within the boundaries of their mutual suspicion and divergent ideologies demonstrated the inherent humanity buried within their competing political goals. Unfortunately, the forging of this de facto partnership came too late to save the lives of hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian victims of famine.

Like many of its actions in the 1980s, the impediments which the Mengistu government placed in the way of American relief officials signified the instability of the regime rather than its strength and sense of confidence. By perceiving and dealing with the Mengistu regime as an orthodox communist government guilty of stultifying agricultural policies, Washington credited it with far more ideological rigour and organizational coherence than it possessed. It was the regime's own incompetence and lust for power, more than its ideological differences with the United States, that led it to the erratic behaviour that undermined American sympathy towards it. Its disastrous policies and crimes against humanity built domestic and international goodwill for its opponents, and made the fall of the Mengistu government more

important to the United States than American distaste for the groups which ousted Mengistu in May 1991.

CONCLUSION

The efforts of the United States and Ethiopia to reconcile their divergent approaches to famine from 1950 to 1991 provide important lessons for all those with a deep interest in the politics of international relief. Although geo-politics certainly played a role in U.S. relations with Ethiopia, some of the American proposals for the improvement of the conditions of Ethiopia's peasants were motivated by a concern for the sons and daughters of the soil. But famine and external food assistance had very different meanings for the Imperial Ethiopian Government and its successor, the Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia. In their relations with the American government, both Ethiopian regimes demonstrated that they saw famine and American agricultural development aid as posing threats and opportunities.

American agricultural aid and advice in the 1950s were forces for change. Aid administrators sought moderate, but definite change in the institutional framework of agriculture in Ethiopia. The Imperial Government saw some of the American proposals for change as threats to the structure of the Imperial political and social system. That system impoverished peasants, but was upheld by Emperor Haile Sellassie and his officials as part of Ethiopia's traditions. Emperor Haile Sellassie never thought of American Point Four agricultural

development aid outside of its significance for the consolidation of Imperial power. An Emperor who sounded so modern in his public speeches and appeared so progressive in his relations with the American government, but resisted American suggestions for change in the institutional contexts of Ethiopian agriculture, represented a paradox in the American-Ethiopian partnership to combat famine in Ethiopia.

The pattern of land ownership in Imperial Ethiopia alienated many peasants and trapped them in exploitative land tenure relations. The scant attention which the Imperial Government paid to this obvious problem reflected its disdain for the peasantry and signified that it hardly wanted the ordinary Ethiopian peasant to become a prosperous, independent farmer who might contribute to the formation of an alternative power base that would erode Imperial authoritarianism. Yet, while American officials showed sensitivity towards the land question as a central element in the Imperial Government's traditions and conception of power, American Point Four aid provided mechanisms for empowering Ethiopian students to sustain a demand for change in Ethiopian society.

Since Point Four originated overseas, the Imperial Government could conveniently interpret it as a component of a plot by foreigners to undermine Ethiopia's identity. Ironically, the Emperor and his officials exploited that interpretation even as they channelled the bonanza of Point

Four assistance to bolster the Imperial regime and what they defined as Ethiopia's identity.

Far from ushering in an era of hope, the overthrow of the Imperial Government by soldiers, students and other beneficiaries of American aid to Ethiopia and the reform of the land holding system spawned new ironies. In the aftermath of the fall of the Imperial regime, ethnic nationalism became just as compelling a problem in Ethiopia as the economic predicament which American agricultural aid to Imperial Ethiopia sought to resolve. The projection of group grievance beyond social and economic needs to the search for separate nationhood as a mechanism for pursuing those needs led to the breakdown of a multi-ethnic co-existence. Ethnic conflicts in the revolutionary period also crippled agriculture and sabotaged Ethiopia's food supply.

Both the state and its opponents used revolution and Marxism-Leninism as ideological underpinnings to promote their own brands of nationalism and to justify their right to rule. Marxism-Leninism as a state ideology was meant to fulfil three objectives for the revolutionary regime. First, it provided an alternative framework for organising a post-Imperial society in which the state and its opponents sought to diminish the influence of the Ethiopian church on public attitudes. Second, it provided a framework for centralizing and sustaining power in a post-Imperial state stripped of Church and Emperor. Third, the Revolutionary Government advanced class

explanations of social relations to counter the invocation of ethnicity as an organising principle in a multi-ethnic society.

The Revolutionary Government's idea that Marxism-Leninism could nurture egalitarian social relations and enhance national unity through a collective work ethic turned out to be as imaginary as the Imperial Government's conception of a bountiful Ethiopia. But the devotion of the Revolutionary Government to the myth of a successful Marxist-Leninist revolution in the midst of mass death from starvation accentuated the problem of social and political organization in Ethiopia. Ethiopians failed to reach a consensus on national unity, secession or voluntary federalism as the core principle of national organization and resorted to violence rather than dialogue to resolve the conflict of ideas.

Yet the accommodation which the Revolutionary Government reached with the United States, even in the midst of its ideological wars with Washington, demonstrated its awareness that conflict and competition provided mechanisms for resolving differences. Ethiopia's strained cooperation with the United States in the relief of famine indicated that models to resolve conflicts existed which the Ethiopian Government should have applied in its domestic politics to avoid recourse to war with its opponents and the transformation of agricultural policy and famine-relief into war strategies.

The Ethiopian civil war also demonstrated the difficulties of giving aid to warring parties without reinforcing the movements and policies which fostered war. The United States was impelled to pursue its humanitarian policies within the framework of the politically-motivated agricultural strategies of the Ethiopian government because the donor community failed to achieve unanimity on appropriate relief strategies. Yet all the food-donating countries could see that the Ethiopian Government and anti-Government forces looked to them and their aid as sources of empowerment.

The United States used its food relief to ameliorate the negative consequences of the Revolutionary Government's ideological policies, while seeking to push human rights and democratization onto the centre-stage of Ethiopian domestic politics. The Revolutionary Government resisted American methods in the name of determining its own policies and path to development. Yet, many of the Revolutionary Government's policies were self-defeating. Its prohibition on the free movement of food across regions and its irrational routing of food shipments received from donors aggravated rather than improved the human condition in Ethiopia. These policies were further compounded by the congestion of food at the ports while the state and its opponents fought and port authorities bickered over bureaucratic procedures.

The Cross Border Operation from the Sudan and American insistence that food be moved expeditiously overcame the bureaucratic politics which impeded the rapid movement of food from ports to its intended destinations. That bold policy of the United States ensured cooperation, though unpublicized, between the anti-Communist Reagan Administration and the anti-American Mengistu government. It further indicated that in the deepest ideological confrontations over different visions of society, room exists for nations to cooperate. In U.S. relations with Revolutionary Ethiopia, tacit accommodation saved the lives of thousands of potential victims of famine. That lesson was not quickly grasped by the revolutionary state and its opponents in the resolution of their own ideological conflicts.

The donor community should have used its response to famine in Ethiopia to initiate a process for resolving the civil war and giving aid without being dragged into taking positions on Ethiopia's domestic politics. On the contrary, in Ethiopia, the success which the state and its opponents achieved in manipulating international opinion and relief aid to build domestic and international support led them to ossify their political attitudes. In the use of famine and starvation as military tools, the armed liberation fronts which opposed the Ethiopian Government were as guilty of the resulting crimes against humanity as the Ethiopian state. The charges of genocide against the Revolutionary Government which received

world-wide publicity and became the focus of Congressional reviews of American policy towards Ethiopia obscured the criminal and parallel manipulation of famine and food supplies by the armed insurgent groups.

The available evidence, barring the discovery of new orders among the documents in the possession of the Ethiopian Central High Court trying officials of the Mengistu Government, suggests that the Revolutionary Government did not use famine and starvation against particular ethnic and political groups with the object of exterminating them. It manipulated food supplies to compel loyalty to itself, to legitimate resettlement, which it undertook to neutralize mounting armed opposition in 1984, and to justify its search for new sources of funds to salvage its failed agricultural development programs. Despite these motives, resettlement was a callous and inhuman way of salvaging a failed socialist revolution.

In spite of its obstructive conduct, the Revolutionary Ethiopian Government showed that it was vulnerable to international opinion. American criticism of the Ethiopian Government's resettlement campaign was justified and played a role in the discontinuation of the program in 1986. The concentration of American criticism on the Ethiopian Government, however, created a distorted image of Ethiopian realities and gave undue credence to armed insurgent movements. Arguably, the United States showed its

determination to prevent a Holocaust or a Cambodia-like genocide in Ethiopia. While the comparison requires careful distinctions, the enormous scope and impact of the Ethiopian Government's policies, especially the post-1984 resettlement, conjured up visions of the Holocaust. The lessons of the Holocaust and the Cambodian Genocide encouraged the United States to critically monitor the uses of its food in Ethiopia and to intensify its criticism of the atrocities of the Mengistu Government.

Massive international relief efforts from 1984 to 1990 aided by American vigilance and human rights policy reduced the number of deaths from starvation in Ethiopia. Would very many lives have been saved had Canada, Australia and Italy as well as the OAU joined the United States in vigorously opposing the politically-motivated policies of the Ethiopian Government and its domestic opponents when they inflicted mass death caused by famine? The divergence of opinion among officials of the United States, Canada, Italy, Australia and the U.N. over the Ethiopian Government's post-1984 resettlement campaign indicated that whereas the international community spoke in reasonable unison about human rights, it acted at cross purposes in upholding a human rights philosophy in Ethiopia.

The lack of a consensus between the United States and its Western allies on how far foreign aid should be used not only to relieve the consequences of Ethiopia's chosen paths of

development, but also to address its inherent contradictions, was a tragedy. The absence of a common front immensely assisted the Ethiopian Government and its armed opponents to pursue their lethal courses of action under the cloak of-self-determination. Disunity among the donors fostered famine and the disaster of famine was not contained until the victory of anti-Government forces over the Government in May 1991. Once the dogs of war were loosed, violence was established as the main avenue for settling domestic conflict and resolving competing visions of society. Civil war sowed the seeds of destruction and created the conditions for yet another ethno-nationalist bloodbath in Ethiopia's not so distant future.

John Prendergast has argued that humanitarian aid provides strong levers in conflict-induced famine emergencies. According to him, conditioning the provision of food on the cessation of the conflict is more appropriate than the usual approach of throwing food on the flames of war.¹ Such a policy seems a heartless betrayal of the innocent victims, but no better alternative may exist. It is difficult to know what would have happened in Ethiopia had the donor community tied its famine-relief aid to the cessation of war between the Mengistu Government and the EPLF, TPLF and OLF. The historical record, however, indicates that foreign donations of food prolonged the war in Ethiopia. Government and anti-Government

¹ John Prendergast, Frontline Diplomacy: Humanitarian Aid and Conflict in Africa (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996), pp. 3, 9, 27, 113, 140.

groups used some of the food to feed their soldiers and build domestic political loyalties.

Today, the most compelling challenge is for people around the globe to renew their commitment to seeing man-made famine eliminated by the end of the century. No other memorial to the victims of the Ethiopian famines of the post-World War II era could be more appropriate. Towards that end, the international community should seek new approaches and consider the following recommendations:

1. The history of Ethiopia's famines from 1975 to 1991 demonstrated that international aid donors should harmonize their famine-relief policies. When Canada, Italy, Australia, the United States and the numerous NGOs acted at cross purposes in Ethiopia to fulfil contradictory mandates and divergent foreign policy goals, the warring parties detected and exploited their differences.

2. The harmonization of relief policies by donor agencies should be attempted in the early stages of a developing civil conflict rather than the later ones. In Ethiopia, the donors should have intervened in 1976 when the PMAC and its opponents resorted to terror to settle their political differences. Neither the PMAC nor its opponents had a firm political base in 1976. The PMAC was still resolving the question of who would lead the revolution. New political movements were emerging. The fledgling government and its opponents sought donor aid to survive. It is unlikely that they could have

defied mass protests from Ethiopians and the international community demanding dialogue rather than violence. The United States and Canada, the OAU and African embassies in Addis Ababa were aware of the vulnerability of the PMAC and its opponents, but failed to act in concert to prevent the looming civil war. Concerned American Congressional leaders falsely assumed that the EPRP would emerge as the victor in the Ethiopian conflict.

3. Aid donors should act in concert with established regional bodies and continent-wide organizations. The United States should have enhanced the capacity of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) to exert pressure on Ethiopia, as a member state, by granting that organization funds to mount a peace initiative. IGADD, which was formed in January 1986, had among its aims the promotion of peace and stability in the East African sub-region. Enlisting other IGADD members--Kenya, Djibouti and Sudan--in a search for peace would have imposed a moral obligation upon them to moderate the behaviour of a member government with better results than those the United States achieved through relief operations in Ethiopia and through criticism of the Ethiopian Government in the U.N. General Assembly. As a partner in the search for peace, Sudan could not have continued to act to fuel the war in Ethiopia. Moreover, had African countries demanded the conditioning of aid on progress towards peace in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian

Government could not have claimed that American relief aid and criticisms of the Revolutionary Government had imperialist and racist motives.

4. The tragedy in Ethiopia should awaken the OAU to the need to establish a Crisis Intervention Unit or a Humanitarian Affairs Bureau to liaise with aid donors to prevent war and famine of the kind that occurred in Ethiopia. The OAU Executive Committee should have the power to censor its recalcitrant members by barring them from attending its sessions and revoking their representation on OAU and UNECA agencies. The participation of the OAU in famine-relief and the projection of its moral authority over its members would constitute a constructive step towards the assertion of African sovereignty over African humanitarian crises.

5. Harmonized pressure from donor governments, the OAU and regional bodies should be directed equally at anti-government groups and governments leaders. In Ethiopia, widespread publicity about state depredations in the Western media empowered political opponents such as the TPLF and EPLF. The international community should refrain from aiding warring parties in civil wars and regard all sides as enemies of peace whose activities threaten international security.

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 Taye Gurmu, former Deputy Commissioner, RRC
 Tekliwoini Assefa, Head, Relief Society of Tigray
 Tesfaye Mekasha Amare, ex-Vice-Minister,
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 Weeks, Willet Head, Save the Children
 Federation (USA)
 Wolde-Birhan Hagos, Peasant, Tigray
 Yimer Woraki, Oral Historian
 Yusuf Abdi, Peasant, Alemaya
 Zegeye Asfaw, former Minister of
 Agriculture and Settlement
 Zelleke Shibeshi, Head, Relief and
 Grants Section, CRS

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A group of older peasants at Mersa, North Wollo

A group of peasants at Kutaber, North
Wollo

Eight ex-Relief Workers, Bati, South Wollo

Eight Peasants at Sherafo locality in Eastern Zone
of Tigray

Elder Farmers, Relief Recipients and
Workers, Ebinat, South Gondar

Former Peasant Association Members and Relief
Distributors, Wegel Tena, North Wollo

Ex-soldiers of the EPLF, Asmara, Eritrea

Peasants and Pasoralists at Mertuley
Maryam, East Gojjam

Peasants and Ex-Soldiers at Yeduha, East
Gojjam

Peasants at Astbi woreda, Eastern Zone
of Tigray

Peasants and woreda administrator, Bati,
South Wollo

Resettlees of Pawe Resettlement Village 14 (mainly
Amhara from Menz and Gishe (districts in
North Shoa), Gojjam

Resettlement Village 23 (mainly Oromo from Yifat
and Muga districts in North Shoa)

Resettlement Village 24 (mainly Amhara from Mota
in Gojjam)

Seven participants in the Harbu Villagization
Project, South Wollo

Correspondence

Tafara Deguefe, former Head of the
Commercial Bank of Ethiopia

Tekalign Wolde-Mariam, Dept. of History,
Addis Ababa University

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David A. Korn, former U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to
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Correspondence

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Ethiopia

McCann, James, Department of History,
Boston University

McPherson, Peter, ex-AID Administrator

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APPENDIX
Table A1

U.S. Economic Assistance to Ethiopia, 1950-1991
(U.S. Fiscal Years/Million of U.S. Dollars)

	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955
Econ. Assist.-Total						
Loans		.1	1.2	1.5	2.6	4.1
Grants		.1	1.2	1.5	2.6	4.1
A. Aid and Predecessors.						
Loans			1.2	1.5	2.6	4.1
Grants			1.2	1.5	2.6	4.1
B. Food for Peace						
Loans			1.2	1.5	2.6	4.1
Grants						
Title I-Total						
Repay. in \$-Loans						
Pay. in For. Curr.						
Title II-Total						
E. Relief Ec. Dev. & WFP						
Vol. Relief Agency						
C. Other Econ. Assist.		.1				
Loans						
Grants						
Contr. to IFI						
Peace Corps						
Narcotics						
Other						

Source: U.S. Agency for International Development, Development Research Center, Washington, D.C., "U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants, Obligations and Loan Authorizations." Personal communication from U.S. AID Development Information Center to the author, 12 December 1997.

Table A1 (continued)
U.S. Economic Assistance to Ethiopia, 1950-1991
(U.S. Fiscal Years/Million of U.S. Dollars)

	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961
Econ. Assist.-Total	2.9	9.6	4.9	9.3	7.9	41.6
Loans						
Grants	2.9	9.6	4.9	.5 8.8	7.9	29.1 12.5
A. Aid and Predeces.	2.9	9.6	4.9	6.6	4.8	38.7
Loans				.5		29.1
Grants	2.9	9.6	4.9	6.1	4.8	9.6
B. Food for Peace						
Loans				2.7	3.1	2.9
Grants				2.7	3.1	2.9
Title I-Total						
Repay. in \$-Loans						
Pay. in For. Curr.						
Title II-Total						
E. Relief Ec. Dev. & WFP				2.7	3.1	2.9
Vol. Relief Agency				2.5	2.9	2.7
				.2	.2	.2
C. Other Econ. Assist.						
Loans						
Grants						
Contr. to IFI						
Peace Corps						
Narcotics						
Other						

Table A1 (continued)
U.S. Economic Assistance to Ethiopia, 1950-1991
(U.S. Fiscal Years/Million of U.S. Dollars)

	<u>1962</u>	<u>1963</u>	<u>1964</u>	<u>1965</u>	<u>1966</u>	<u>1967</u>
Econ. Assist.-Total	9.2	14.7	9.2	13.4	46.2	19.0
Loans		5.5	.7	3.0	32.6	7.7
Grants	9.2	9.2	8.5	10.4	13.6	11.3
A. Aid and Predeces.	6.7	10.0	5.2	9.2	35.3	13.6
Loans		4.0	.7	3.0	29.9	5.8
Grants	6.7	6.0	4.5	6.2	5.4	7.8
B. Food for Peace	2.0	2.4	.6	.3	6.4	2.7
Loans		1.5			2.7	1.9
Grants	2.0	.9	.6	.3	3.7	.8
Title I-Total		1.5			2.7	1.9
Repay. in \$-Loans		1.0			2.7	1.9
Pay. in For. Curr.		.5				
Title II-Total	2.0	.9	.6	.3	3.7	.8
E.ReliefEc.Dev.&WFP	1.5		.4		3.4	.4
Vol. Relief Agency	.5	.9	.2	.3	.3	.4
C. Other Econ. Assist.	.5	2.3	3.4	3.9	4.5	2.7
Loans						
Grants	.5	2.3	3.4	3.9	4.5	2.7
Contr. to IFI						
Peace Corps	.5	2.3	3.4	3.9	4.5	2.7
Narcotics						
Other						

Table A1 (continued)
U.S. Economic Assistance to Ethiopia, 1950-1991
(U.S. Fiscal Years/Million of U.S. Dollars)

	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973
Econ. Assist.-Total	9.3	20.8	18.9	23.4	33.0	12.0
Loans	1.0	13.0	10.6	14.9	26.7	4.8
Grants	8.3	7.8	8.3	8.5	6.3	7.2
A. Aid and Predeces.	6.8	17.2	15.6	20.4	31.1	8.8
Loans	1.0	13.0	10.6	14.9	26.7	4.8
Grants	5.8	4.2	5.0	5.5	4.4	4.0
B. Food for Peace	.1	1.0	1.3	.9	.8	1.0
Loans						
Grants	.1	1.0	1.3	.9	.8	1.0
Title I-Total						
Repay. in \$-Loans						
Pay. in For. Curr.						
Title II-Total	.1	1.0	1.3	.9	.8	1.0
E.ReliefEc.Dev.&WFP		.8	1.1	.8	.7	.9
Vol. Relief Agency	.1	.2	.2	.1	.1	.1
C. Other Econ. Assist.	2.4	2.6	2.0	2.1	1.1	2.2
Loans						
Grants	2.4	2.6	2.0	2.1	1.1	2.2
Contr. to IFI						
Peace Corps	2.4	2.6	2.0	2.1	1.1	2.2
Narcotics						
Other						

Table A1 (continued)
U.S. Economic Assistance to Ethiopia, 1950-1991
(U.S. Fiscal Years/Million of U.S. Dollars)

	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1979</u>
Econ. Assist.-Total	36.4	23.8	13.8	5.6	10.3	15.8
Loans	15.0	7.2	3.4			
Grants	21.4	16.6	10.1	5.6	10.3	15.8
A. Aid and Predeces.	20.7	17.2	5.6	.9	5.2	3.3
Loans	15.0	7.2				
Grants	5.7	10.0	5.6	.9	5.2	3.3
B. Food for Peace	13.9	5.2	7.2	4.6	5.0	12.6
Loans			3.4			
Grants	13.9	5.2	3.8	4.6	5.0	12.6
Title I-Total			3.4			
Repay. in \$-Loans			3.4			
Pay. in For. Curr.						
Title II-Total	13.9	5.2	3.8	4.6	5.0	12.6
E.ReliefEc.Dev.&WFP	13.9	5.2	3.2	4.2	4.8	11.4
Vol. Relief Agency			.6	2.4	.4	1.2
C. Other Econ. Assist.	1.8	1.4	.7	.1		
Loans						
Grants	1.8	1.4	.7	.1		
Contr. to IFI						
Peace Corps	1.8	1.4	.7	.1		
Narcotics						
Other						

Table A1 (continued)
U.S. Economic Assistance to Ethiopia, 1950-1991
(U.S. Fiscal Years/Million of U.S. Dollars)

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Econ. Assist.-Total	15.0	5.0	2.5	2.8	9.8	87.4
Loans						
Grants	15.0	5.0	2.5	2.8	9.8	87.4
A. Aid and Predeces.						
Loans						.5
Grants						.5
B. Food for Peace	15.0	5.0	2.5	2.8	9.8	86.9
Loans						
Grants	15.0	5.0	2.5	2.8	9.8	86.9
Title I-Total						
Repay. in \$-Loans						
Pay. in For. Curr.						
Title II-Total	15.0	5.0	2.5	2.8	9.8	86.9
E.ReliefEc.Dev.&WFP	13.5	1.6		.2	1.9	14.5
Vol. Relief Agency	1.5	3.4	2.5	2.6	7.9	72.5
C. Other Econ. Assist.						
Loans						
Grants						
Contr. to IFI						
Peace Corps						
Narcotics						
Other						

Table A1 (continued)
U.S. Economic Assistance to Ethiopia, 1950-1991
(U.S. Fiscal Years/Million of U.S. Dollars)

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Econ. Assist.-Total	78.3	6.1	51.4	33.1	72.3	52.2
Loans						
Grants	78.3	6.1	51.4	33.1	72.3	52.2
A. Aid and Predecess.						
Loans			.7	.6	.4	.8
Grants			.7	.6	.4	.8
B. Food for Peace	78.3	6.1	50.6	32.4	71.9	51.4
Loans						
Grants	78.3	6.1	50.6	32.4	71.9	51.4
Title I-Total						
Repay. in \$-Loans						
Pay. in For. Curr.						
Title II-Total	78.3	6.1	50.6	32.4	71.9	51.4
E.ReliefEc.Dev.&WFP				4.7	4.5	21.8
Vol. Relief Agency	78.3	6.1	50.6	27.7	67.4	29.6
C. Other Econ. Assist.						
Loans						
Grants						
Contr. to IFI						
Peace Corps						
Narcotics						
Other						

APPENDIX

Table A2
U.S. Military Assistance to Ethiopia, 1950-1991
(U.S. Fiscal Years/Million of U.S. Dollars)

	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955
Mil. Assist.-Total						
Loans					5.1	1.1
Grants					5.1	1.1
A. MAP Grants					5.0	.9
B. Credit Financing						
C. Intl. Mtl. Ed. Trng.					.1	.2
D. Tran-Excess Stock.						
E. Other Grants						

Source: U.S. Agency for International Development, Development Research Center, Washington, D.C., "U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants, Obligations and Loan Authorizations." Personal communication from U.S. AID Development Information Center to the author, 12 December 1997.

Table A2 (continued)
U.S. Military Assistance to Ethiopia, 1950-1991
(U.S. Fiscal Years/Million of U.S. Dollars)

	<u>1956</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1958</u>	<u>1959</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1961</u>
Mil. Assist.-Total	5.1	11.2	7.6	8.9	6.2	17.8
Loans						
Grants	5.1	11.2	7.6	8.9	6.2	17.8
A. MAP Grants	4.6	10.5	6.3	6.6	3.8	12.7
B. Credit Financing						
C. Intl. Mtl. Ed. Trng.	.5	.4	.4	1.9	1.3	.6
D. Tran-Excess Stock.		.3	.9	.3	1.2	4.5
E. Other Grants						

Table A2 (continued)
U.S. Military Assistance to Ethiopia, 1950-1991
(U.S. Fiscal Years/Million of U.S. Dollars)

	<u>1962</u>	<u>1963</u>	<u>1964</u>	<u>1965</u>	<u>1966</u>	<u>1967</u>
Mil. Assist.-Total	18.2	8.4	8.5	10.1	15.9	18.2
Loans						
Grants	18.2	8.4	8.5	10.1	15.9	18.2
A. MAP Grants	7.7	5.3	6.0	7.2	12.3	14.4
B. Credit Financing						
C. Intl. Mtl. Ed. Trng.	1.1	.4	1.2	1.5	1.9	1.7
D. Tran-Excess Stock.	3.9	2.7	1.4	1.4	1.7	2.2
E. Other Grants	5.5					

Table A2 (continued)
U.S. Military Assistance to Ethiopia, 1950-1991
(U.S. Fiscal Years/Million of U.S. Dollars)

	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973
Mil. Assist.-Total	12.0	12.4	11.9	13.2	12.1	12.2
Loans						
Grants	12.0	12.4	11.9	13.2	12.1	12.2
A. MAP Grants	9.9	10.3	9.3	10.5	9.4	8.8
B. Credit Financing						
C. Intl. Mtl. Ed. Trng.	1.5	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.2	.7
D. Tran-Excess Stock	.7	.8	1.4	1.4	1.5	2.7
E. Other Grants						

Table A2 (continued)
U.S. Military Assistance to Ethiopia, 1950-1991
(U.S. Fiscal Years/Million of U.S. Dollars)

	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u>	<u>1978-1991</u>
Mil. Assist.-Total	23.4	38.0	6.2	2.7	
Loans	11.0	25.0			
Grants	12.4	13.0	6.2	2.7	
A. MAP Grants	10.8	12.1	5.2	2.5	
B. Credit Financing	11.0	25.0			
C. Intl. Mtl. Ed. Trng.	.8	.8	1.0	.3	
D. Tran-Excess Stock	.8	.1			
E. Other Grants					

GLOSSARY

Ato	Mister
Awraja	district
Balambaras	military and aristocratic title (chief of the elevated plateau)
Belg	short rainy season
Birr	unit of Ethiopian currency (literally, silver)
Dergue	committee (used in reference to the military government which deposed Haile Sellassie)
Gasha	an equivalent of 40 hectares
Gult	overlordship entitling one to tribute
Injera	a popular Ethiopian food
Kebele	locality or neighbourhood
Ketema	town
Ketena	zone
Lij	aristocratic title (young nobleman)
Meher	long rainy season
Ras	top military title (highest honour in the feudal hierarchy next to the king)
Rist	land held by right of membership of a community or kinship group
Semon	land belonging to the church or one over which the church exacted tribute
Teff	<i>Eragrostis abyssinica</i> (grain used to prepare the national dish, injera)
Woreda	sub-district











